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If the Earth's MAGNETIC FIELD Failed

By LYLE D. GUNN

Here is a fantastic story of what could happen to the Earth if the sun developed an unusual rash of sunspots on its face

THE earth is a magnet. Like any other magnet, it is surrounded by a magnetic field. No more than a compass is needed to demonstrate the lines of force running between its two poles.

What would happen if that magnetic field failed?

The course of evolution would be turned back two hundred million years! Great thunder-lizards would walk the earth again. Flying reptiles would wing their huge bodies over towering fern fronds. Gigantic insects would fight for supremacy in the weird light of a world lashed by titanic forces.

And mankind, unless it fled from those forces, would become a new race of nightmare monsters!

It seems impossible, of course, that anywhere in the universe there exists a single power capable of producing those cataclysmic effects. Yet it is with us all the time and all around us—in the eight hundred million billion cosmic rays which strike the earth every second with a thousand times the voltage of lightning!

Why don't we suffer any ill effects from that merciless bombardment now? It amounts to about thirty shots at every human body each second. Considering that there are some thousand trillion trillion atoms in the average body, it seems that there is no dearth of targets. Some damage should be done.

But, though we seem solid enough, those atoms are as far apart as island universes! Even their planetary electrons are separated from each other and the central nucleus by distances proportionally as great as those between members of the solar system. The chances of a direct hit are infinitesimal. The projectiles go straight through us without touching us!

A few, perhaps, do hit. It is believed that some freaks—five legged calves, ten-fingered children—are the result of damage done to the parental germ plasm by cosmic rays. Mutations are produced by changes in the genes, the carriers of heredity. In this way, experimenting on flies with X-rays, scientists have created hundreds of new species and thousands of freakish variations. But such cases would be as nothing compared to what we would have if the earth's magnetic field were to weaken or fail.

That magnetic field is our protection against the unbridled forces of the universe! It acts as a shield, repulsing by far the greater part of the cosmic radiation raining in on the earth from some unknown source in space. Only cosmic rays of energy greater than 200,000,000 electron volts are able to penetrate it.

The amount that gets through may seem, from the figure given, a heavy deluge. But if the potential of the field were to drop, if the shield let in the far greater quantity of lower energy rays, a veritable cloudburst of malignant radiation would descend upon us!

No longer will it be a matter of random hits. That solid blanket will miss nothing!

It will recreate the conditions controlling evolution two hundred million years ago, make over every life form developed since! Lion-sized ants, the highest order of modern insects, will vie with Tyrannosaurus Rex, king of the dinosaurs. Man, changed unrecognizably, will no longer be Ruler of Earth!

And the earth itself will be strangely altered.

To see how these stupendous results would be produced, directly or indirectly, by the all-changing radiation from space, we need note only a few simple facts concerning cosmic rays. They are, to begin with, electrically charged particles of extremely high energy. Even the slowest of them, once they pierce the earth's magnetic shield, are able to smash other particles out of atoms of the air with such force that those in turn are able to disrupt still other atoms!

It is this 'shower' effect that makes cosmic rays capable of devastating, wide-spread influence. A single cosmic ray, before the series of collisions is ended, can produce a burst of fifty thousand other particles! These include, as a result of various interactions, many different kinds of particles. For the moment we are interested in only one kind—high-energy electrons.

These are the same light-weight, negative particles which in laboratories are trained on various elements to cause them to emit neutrons. The latter, neutral particles two thousand times as heavy as electrons, are capable of making stable elements become radioactive!

We are now near the end of the chain which leads from cosmic rays to the second Age of Reptiles. Remember that if the earth's magnetic shield weakened ever so slightly, an immensely increased influx of cosmic radiation would cause this whole process to be performed on a stupendous scale. The earth would be covered with radioactive substances!

Among them would be K_{40}, the radioactive isotope, or variety, of potassum.

Potassium affects growth, plays a vital role in important life processes. It enters into the structure of all animals and plants. Two hundred million years ago its K_{40} isotope was prevalent in the soil, though all has long since broken down into stable form. And that radioactive potassium, entering into the life forms

(continued on page 130)

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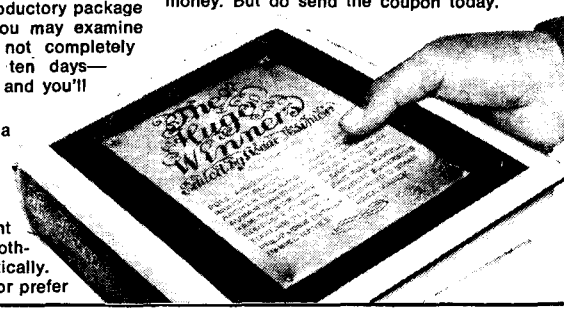

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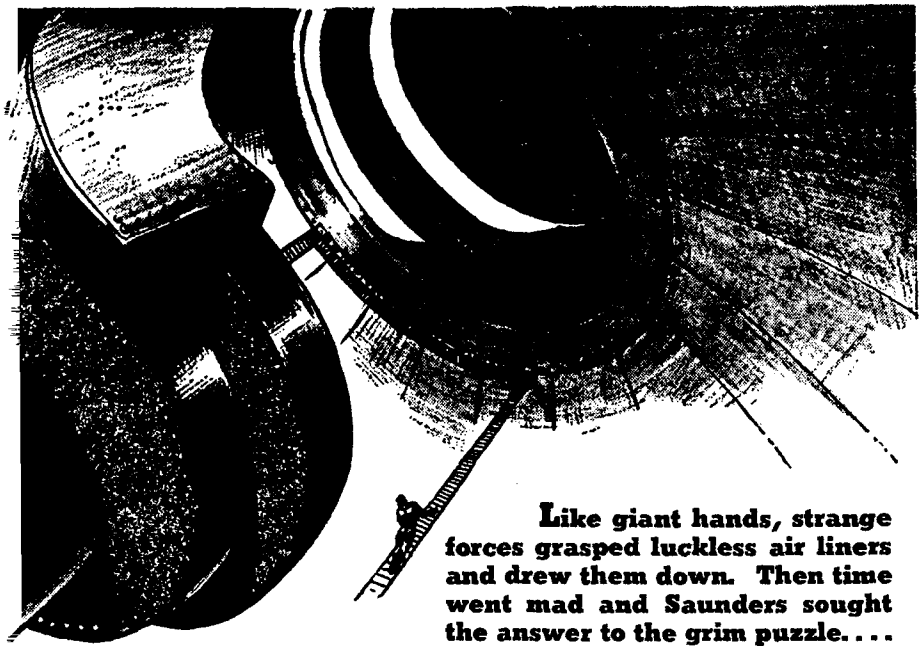

Like giant hands, strange forces grasped luckless air liners and drew them down. Then time went mad and Saunders sought the answer to the grim puzzle. . . .

CHAPTER I

Death in the Air

THE plane, with its single passenger — few people dared to travel by air, or by any other means, after all the things that had happened— was far above the clouds, in the quiet reaches of the upper air, where it should have been safe. But the eyes of the two pilots moved constantly over the thick blackness of the storm below them, and their faces were tense.

Suddenly, with the quick hiss of indrawn breath, the eyes of the pilot at the control clamped on the altimeter.

"Look!" he shouted.

His partner's face went white when he saw what the instrument was doing.

"We're falling!" he screamed. "Falling like a stone!"

The motors still roared. Nothing unusual was visible in the sky around them. But the fabric of the ship creaked and popped as though it had suddenly been subjected to terrific strains. The pilots fought the controls, but the ship refused to answer.

The door of the control cabin was kicked open and the single passenger lurched in, clutching a brief-case crammed with papers. "We're falling!" he croaked.

"We're doing everything we can to stop it," the sweating pilots told him.

"You've got to stop it!" the passenger screamed at them. "I've got to get through to Washington. Got to! You understand. The fate of every man on earth depends on my getting through to the president. . . ."

His screamed words choked off as a lightning flash played over the clouds like the finger of pointing doom. The passenger, his eyes goggling, stared at the nearing cloud bank. The pilots fought the controls.

Flopping, twisting, spinning, jerked this way and that, the silver ship, in spite of everything the pilots could do, disappeared into the boiling fury of the black clouds.

It never came out.

AN unmistakable grimness lay in the sombre, angular lines of Webb Saunders' face as he peered through the composition glass window of the high-flying plane. His slitted eyes roved over the grim panorama below him.

Black, boiling clouds met his gaze, clouds that stretched away in all directions, clouds that during the past three months had covered almost the whole surface of earth. With the clouds had come rain, hail, high battering tides, crazy sudden storms that swept from nowhere. Ships had sunk at sea and planes had crashed on land. Tall buildings had top-

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pled down. And the best chronometers of the world's observatories had started losing time!

The foremost scientists of earth had tried to find a cause for the freakish storms, and had failed. If a solution was not soon found, human life was in danger of being obliterated. Even the offer of a million dollar reward had not brought forward a solution.

Webb's eyes followed the boiling clouds. He shivered, turned to Ethan Riley, who was piloting the plane.

"How much farther to where—to where the liner crashed?" he shouted.

Silently, Riley consulted his instruments and maps. "She was just over the border of Utah when she crashed," he said. "Almost where we are right now. And that was the third ship that went down in this region during the past few days. None of them have been found."

"We've got to find this one!" Webb Saunders blazed. "McDuff Traffern was the single passenger that plane carried. And he's the only man who has discovered the cause of all these storms!"

Webb held his voice down with an effort. Riley glanced at him, saw he was under great strain. "I'm with you, Webb," Riley spoke. "We'll find Traffern if he is still alive."

There was friendship and something more in Riley's voice. However they were more than friends. Companions from childhood on, Riley had chosen to go into aviation, while Webb Saunders had developed his early scientific bent to the point where he was assistant to McDuff Traffern in the Mount Wilson observatory. When Webb had gone to Ethan Riley for help, he had known he would get what he asked for. He had wanted a plane, and a man to fly it. Riley had the plane. And he could fly it. Even when Webb had told him that he wanted to search for the airliner in which Traffern had crashed, Riley had not hesitated.

"I'd like to know this much," Riley went on, his eyes constantly moving over the fury of the boiling clouds below the ship. "How do you know Traffern has discovered the cause of all these storms?"

"Lynn told me," Webb answered. And he thought of Lynn Carter, the blue-eyed niece of gruff old McDuff Traffern. She lived with her uncle. And she had been frantic when Webb left. Seeing those storm clouds roll beneath the plane, Webb was glad he had not yielded to her mad plea to come with him in this search for her uncle.

"I was down in Los Angeles all this week," Webb went on quickly. "Waiting for a shipment of infrared light ray photographic equipment. I got back at noon today. Lynn told me that while I was gone her Uncle Mac had been working day and night. This morning he came stumbling out of his laboratory, waving sheets of paper and croaking, 'I've got it. Incredible and impossible as the truth is, I've found the answer.' He radioed the president that he had made a discovery of the utmost importance, a discovery that would necessitate the cooperation of the army and the air force, and that he was coming east immediately, by the first plane. Taking all his papers with him, he went straight to the airport and chartered a plane. As soon as the clouds lifted a little, he took off. I had no more than returned to the observatory and talked to Lynn than the radio told us his plane had crashed. I came directly to you."

Riley glanced at his companion when Webb mentioned Lynn. The aviator suspected that Webb and Lynn were a little more than the good friends they pretended to be. But he didn't mention what he suspected. He listened to Webb, and nodded slowly.

"Traffern knew something," Riley stated. "From what you say, I think there is no doubt but that he had made some startling discovery. But—" He looked at Webb— "I wonder if that radio message was intercepted!"

"What?" Webb sat up straight. His heart jumped with a sudden, heavy pounding as he caught the implication in Riley's words. "You mean he was killed to keep him from revealing his discovery?"

"That's exactly what I mean." Riley answered quickly. "I knew the men who flew his ship. In spite of any storm, they would have gone through. They knew their business, and their orders were to stay in the stratosphere, above the clouds. A fragmentary radio message got through from them. They saw no sign of an attacking plane. But their ship was out of control, falling from a mysterious cause!"

Ethan Riley jerked the words out of the corner of his mouth, and while he talked, he was constantly watching the clouds below him for a nameless menace that snatched ships out of the air.

WEBB SAUNDERS sank down in his padded seat. "Oh, Lord!" he whispered. "If Traffern was deliberately killed, then what we thought was an inexplicable storm period is in reality a definite plot of some kind against earth. And in order to solve what's happening, we have to fit into the picture such unbelievable phenomena as tidal waves, earthquakes, hurricanes, and—maddest of all—the fact that time, as measured by the most accurate clocks that science is able to build is apparently slowing down!"

"We've got to solve harder things than that!" Riley snapped, his eyes jerking from the boiling clouds to the instrument panel in front of him. "Look at that altimeter!"

The red hand on the dial had gone crazy. Like the blow of a mighty fist, the amazing fact was forced home to Webb. Although the motors were throbbing steadily the altimeter showed that they were falling at a rate of hundreds of feet each second.

Falling, falling, *falling* toward the fury of the boiling clouds!

Riley jerked the controls almost out of their sockets, kicked the motors to full power. Sweat

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poured down over him.

"The air seems to have fallen out from under us," he shouted. "The props don't take hold! Neither do the elevators. . . ."

The ship turned over and over. Webb was thrown so hard against his safety belt that the heavy fabric cut into his body. He got one glimpse of clouds coming up to meet him. Then he was in the twisting fury of the mists. Jagged tongues of lightning leaped around him. The sharp crack of thunder echoed. And still the ship went down.

Around the ship loomed ragged, tortuous mountains. Riley missed a peak by inches. The plane was sucked into a side canyon. Then, with a rending of metal that sounded like a giant dog crushing a bone between its teeth, they crashed.

Webb's belt snapped. He was hurled across the cabin, and, as his head struck the instrument panel, he was hurled into the deep blackness of night.

CHAPTER II

Incredible Death

A RATTLING noise and the sound of a voice calling to him from a vast distance brought Webb back to consciousness. Grinding his teeth against the pain, he forced himself to sit up. He looked straight into the haggard, bloody face of Ethan Riley, who was bending over him.

"You all right?" Riley muttered. Webb managed to nod. He got to his feet.

He had been lying in the lee of the wrecked plane from which Riley had pulled him. The rattling sound came again. He saw what was causing it. Hail. Hard, white balls of ice sweeping down from the sky, rattling from the metal wreckage. Abruptly the hail changed to rain.

"Where are we?" Webb asked dully.

"Lost in the mountains in what looks like the graveyard of the airplanes," Riley answered. He led Webb around the ship, pointed down the slope.

Webb's eyes followed his comrade's pointing hand. Blurred and indistinct through the driving rain, he caught a glimpse of something that made him gasp.

"The wreck of an airship!"

Riley nodded. "There's another farther down the slope," he added.

"One of them must be the ship in which Traffern was traveling," Webb snapped. "He may be in the wreckage, badly hurt. Come on. We've got to get to him." Webb started down the slope.

"Not so fast," Riley protested. Webb turned, looked back.

Riley wasn't looking down the slope toward the wrecked liner. He was peering up, into the swirling mist of the low clouds, striving with narrowed eyes to see through the driving rain.

"What is it?" Webb whispered, struck with a sudden premonition.

"When I was dragging you out of our plane, I got a glimpse of something in the air," Riley answered slowly. "I couldn't see it very clearly, but it looked like a ship of some kind."

"A ship! Flying through this storm?"

Riley nodded. "I only got a glimpse of it. But it didn't have wings and the storm didn't bother it at all. It was poking slowly along as if it was looking for something."

Webb felt the touch of a nameless chill. A ship flying through the fury of this storm! A ship without wings! His eyes widened in apprehension. He peered through the rain. A white finger of lightning reached down from the sky and the mountains echoed with the rolling boom of the thunder. But nothing met his eyes except the swirling clouds.

"I guess I was mistaken," Riley spoke. "I got a bad lick when we smashed up, and I may have been seeing things that weren't real."

Webb felt a little better. Riley had been imagining things. No ship could live in this storm.

They went down the slope, toward the wreckage of the liner. Webb approached it with mingled hope and apprehension. What would they find in that ship? Mangled bodies in the wreckage? Even if Traffern was dead—he thought, with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach—his brief case would be there. And the papers in that case would provide a solution for these mad storms that were threatening to smash all life from the face of earth. Fortunately the ship had not burned.

They didn't get to the wreckage. Fifty yards away from it, lying on the soggy slope, they almost stumbled over the body of a man.

Webb took one look at a face twisted with torture. Then he knew that he would never find McDuff Traffern alive. His heart racked in sick horror. His eyes revolted at the sight.

One arm and a part of the shoulder were gone. The arm had not been jerked or torn off. It had been seared off! The bones visible in the shoulder showed a brown sear and the flesh was cooked black. There was a gaping brownish hole through the chest. And the legs—the body didn't have any legs! Just below the knees, they ended in grotesque stumps.

Clutched in the arm that remained on the body, caught in an iron grip in the fingers—was the leather handle of a brief case. The case was gone. The burnt ground showed what had happened. The same weapon that had been used to kill Traffern had been used to destroy his brief case.

Webb read the whole story in a glance. Traffern had not been killed in the crash of the plane. He had tried to run from the plane, and something, coming from somewhere, had killed him, something that used no weapon known to the science of earth.

The chill of a nameless horror shot through Webb's body. In the flash of a second, he realized that the mad storms that had swept over earth, the astounding behavior of all the clocks on the planet, and the

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death of McDuff Traffern had one common origin. Earth had been invaded!

As the stunning realization swept over him, he heard a humming roar rising above the howling of the wind. And Ethan Riley shouted.

"Duck, Webb! We're being attacked!"

Webb jerked around just in time to see a grim shape swimming down through the rain. A ship! An impossible ship that flew without wings!

It was coming toward them, driving down on them with relentless speed. Its occupants had sighted them.

Webb turned to run. He took one step. Out of the nose of the ship a streak of light lanced at him. He knew a moment of extreme torture as it struck his body. A wave of utter cold enveloped him.

He cried out, once. Then the torture mounted to hellish agonies and the cold seemed to freeze him through and through.

Abruptly, he sank into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III

Pirate Ship

A POUNDING head and an aching body brought Webb back to life. He forced himself to sit up and was tremendously surprised to discover that his muscles obeyed his will. Two facts jolted him immediately.

One was that Riley was lying beside him. The aviator was just regaining consciousness. The other was that they were hurtling along in a ship of some kind, driving through fogs and rain, lifting over mountains.

Then he saw the hunched-over little monster piloting the ship within the all-glass nose, and he forgot all about his pain-wracked body. His eyes opened in astonishment and a cry forced itself through his lips.

The pilot heard him. He locked the controls and turned to face Webb through the thick glass partition that separated them. In his wildest nightmares Webb had never imagined such a face and torso!

The creature was as squat as a dwarf, but as tall as an average man, though his heavy figure made him look short. Tremendous force lay in his powerful limbs, in the massive chest that swelled slowly. He had no neck, and a small, mushroom shaped head sat close on the round shoulders.

His mouth was huge and ugly. From his head weaving tentacles speared out. At their endings were glittering eyes.

Silently, the creature regarded him.

"Who—who are you?" Webb shouted.

The eyes gleamed wickedly. Metallically a voice came from a speaker set in the glass partition.

"Your comrades, whom we have captured, have named me Thomas," came the startling words, in distorted English. "That is as near as my real name can be rendered in your crude language."

"Thomas!" Webb knew he was gibbering. He tried to force himself to think straight. "Where did you come from? Where are you taking us?"

The eyes tilted up to scan the heavens through the transparent walls of the nose of the ship. Then they tilted down and Thomas refused to answer. But the gesture had betrayed him. He had come from somewhere up in the sky.

"I am taking you to Carlos, our ruler," he bit out acidly. The gargantuan mouth had an ugly way of spitting out words.

"Then there are others of your kind here on earth?"

"Yes. Many others."

The words stunned Webb. Many of these creatures were here on earth. Unseen, their existence unguessed, they had stolen in from the voids of space. What was their purpose? Webb asked, but got no answer. He tried another tack.

"You pulled our ship down. You smashed all those other ships. Why?"

"Because we are engaged in extensive construction work in this region, and we do not wish planes to fly over us. One ship we smashed because we intercepted a radio message—we keep a close watch over the ether—to the effect that one of your scientists had discovered the cause of the troublesome storms. Since we do not wish to be disturbed for the next two weeks, we removed Traffern!"

"Removed him!" Webb blazed. "You deliberately murdered him."

Thomas shrugged. "It was not our fault. We merely wanted to prevent him from revealing what he had discovered. After we had captured him, we would have permitted him to remain alive. We could have used him just as we are going to use you. But we discovered that he had broken a leg in the crash of his ship, and we could not use a man with a broken leg. So we destroyed him," he finished callously.

Webb shook with fury. McDuff Traffern, who shrank from killing a fly, had been destroyed because he had suffered a broken leg, and was therefore of no further use to the invaders! Webb boiled at the thought. He leaped to his feet and pounded his fists against the glass partition.

Thomas laughed at him. "You cannot break it. And even if you did, you would find this cabin very unhealthy for you."

His gesture indicated the faint fog that drifted about in the section he occupied.

"What do you mean?" Webb rasped.

"We don't breathe oxygen," the incredible answer came. "This cabin is hermetically sealed off from the section you occupy. It is filled with ammonia gas. This is our natural life medium, but to you, earthman, it would mean sudden, horrible death."

Webb shrank back from the partition. Appalled, he gazed at the drifting fog. Ammonia creatures! As all life on earth breathed oxygen, the invaders breathed ammonia!

With a sudden impulse, the warped monstrosity

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that called himself Thomas turned and darted to the controls. Stubby fingers played over an instrument panel like the keyboard of a typewriter. Several things took place. A brilliant white beam shown down on the mountains, piercing the cloud mist and the rain, illumining the granite crags magically. The forward motion of the car slowed as the ship lurched to the detonation of a rocket tube above them.

"NICE people!" a weak voice rasped behind Webb. He jerked around. Riley was sitting up. The flier was trying to grin.

"I heard your conversation with your little pal up in front. Where is he taking us?"

"To hell, probably!" Webb answered bitterly. "Anyhow we're going down."

A great, black hole yawned beneath the space ship. Now they were dropping swiftly past rough-hewn walls of granite. Both men had the impression of being in a run-away elevator.

Far below, like a view of a well-lighted room seen through a crack, they glimpsed an unearthly scene, a vision that held their eyes. The ship dropped down toward it, slowed to a stop, and grated on the ground.

They were in the midst of the weird nightmare they had glimpsed from above!

Webb and Ethan were stricken with wonder. One hurried glimpse of the cavern revealed hundreds of feet above them, clouds of ionized gas producing a silvery light. To their left were great black buildings that resembled storage batteries grown to skyscraper proportions. To the right was a shining thing that seemed to be a wall forming the end of the cavern. A high, windy sigh came from the wall.

Dozens of the monsters like the pilot came running up. All of them were clad in awkward, transparent suits with bulb-like heads. Their pilot donned a similar suit, opened the door and stepped to the ground. He yanked open the door of their compartment, growled at them.

"Descend."

As they stepped out, a tall figure detached itself from the crowd of monsters. Instantly Thomas bowed. Webb and Ethan caught his snarled, "Prostrate yourselves before Carlos, Earthmen!"

"To hell with you!" Webb rasped. He was an earthman and men did not prostrate themselves to any creature.

The words died on his lips. A dull gray tube, held in the glowering ruler's hand, was pointed toward him. A stream of subtle force writhed through the air from the tube. A surge of bone-wracking agony flooded through his body. Groaning, he sank to the ground. The agony passed, leaving him weak and nauseated. Ethan sat stupidly beside him.

The huge mouth of the ruler spouted words. "That is better. You may as well learn now as later that Carlos alone rules." He turned to the pilot of the ship that had brought them. "There were only two?"

"That was all. They were in one plane, flying directly on the same course as the liner. I followed them, remaining out of sight in the clouds, until they were brought down."

Webb, when he heard the words, felt a pulse of uncontrollable fury. He leaped to his feet, fists clenched. "You can't do any more than kill us," he choked. "And I'd willingly die to know the motive for what you're doing. You've caused the crash of at least four ships. You've murdered an old man for no reason except that his leg was broken and you couldn't use him after you had captured him. You've caused the loss of thousands of lives through the eternal storms you have created over earth. Damn you, I want to know: why are you doing these things?"

Carlos' frog-like face registered displeasure. He brought up the tube that he carried, pointed it, and Webb knew that his mad speech had brought him face to face with death. He held his breath while the ruler fingered his weapon.

Then Carlos shook his head. "I should kill you for your impudence, but killing you can wait until you are no longer of use to us. . . ."

Webb's already pale face went paler. He had just heard his death sentence. But before he died he wanted to know where these monsters had come from, and what they were doing on earth. Doggedly, he repeated his question.

"Since you can never escape to reveal the information," Carlos said. "I will answer your questions. . . . We came from a planet circling the star that you know as Sirius! . . . And our purpose in being here is to steal your world!"

CHAPTER IV

Theft from Sirius

"STEAL earth!" Ethan Riley echoed hollowly, rising to his feet, and standing beside Webb. "That's impossible!"

"Impossible to your barbaric world!" Carlos sneered. "To us—elementary."

Webb studied the ruler's heavy face. "You don't mean you are going to steal the planet," he said as quietly as he could. "You mean you are planning to conquer it."

"I mean no such thing!" Carlos snapped. "I have studied your language carefully during the time we have been here, and I know what I am saying. We are going to steal your planet, to remove it bodily from the solar system!"

Webb swallowed. In that moment he recognized the vastness of the science that was arrayed against them. A race with the knowledge and the power to lift a world from the system in which it belonged! It was inconceivable. And yet he did not doubt it was true. In spite of the stern control his mind was imposing on his body, his voice shook when he asked the next question.

"But why are you planning such an undertaking?"

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Harsh, brassy tones answered him curtly. "Fifty years ago, in your earth time, one of the planets of the solar system of Sirius was struck by a dense comet that tore it from its position and destroyed it.

"The whole balance of our system was destroyed by the loss of that single body. Immediately all the other planets, including our home world, began drawing steadily closer and closer to Sirius. . . . We have known for years that something must be done to stop it. . . . And the only way we can stop it is to replace our lost planet, to restore the original balance of our system. . . .

"Our telescopes, vastly more powerful than yours, have scanned the heavens for a body that we could use. We found that body in your planet. Therefore we are taking it. We have already started moving it from its orbit. . . ." *

As from a great distance, Webb heard Ethan Riley's choked voice. "What about us? What about the people of earth?"

And the callous answer came. "Your fate does not concern us. Unfortunately, you will not survive the journey through space. But that is a small matter. It merely saves us the trouble of hunting you down and destroying you as we would so many vermin!"

At that moment a vast humming echoed through the cavern. The tentacled eyes of the ruler turned up. The humming grew. There came the lashing of a sudden explosion, like the firing of a rocket tube. Automatically, Webb turned to look.

Another ship was coming down the huge hole that led to the outer air. Grating, it came to rest beside them.

Webb thought he had already suffered all the agony, all the shock, all the heartbreak, and all the despair that it was possible for one person to stand. But when he saw one of the figures who stumbled out of that ship he knew that he had only begun to suffer.

"Lynn!" he groaned. "I thought you were safe at the observatory. How did you get here?"

One of the persons who had descended from that alien ship was Lynn Carter, niece of gruff old McDuff Traffern, the man who had died in such agony back there on that mountain slope. She was here, in this hellish cavern under the earth, here where foul monstrosities gabbled insanely of impossible things. She was here. *Here!*

When he saw Lynn Carter stumble out of that ship, Webb Saunders was sick.

SHE heard his voice. Her startled eyes sought him out and she ran toward him. Then she was in his arms, sobbing . . . "Oh, Webb . . . those awful creatures came to the observatory . . . after you left. . . . They wanted to make certain that Uncle Mac had left nothing behind him that would enable anybody else to make the same discovery he had made. . . . They destroyed the observatory . . . obliterated it. . . . They killed the members of the staff who tried to escape. They captured Pierson, and Reynolds . . . and me. . . . Oh, Webb, where are we? Who are those awful creatures? What are they *going to do to us?*"

Webb started to answer but his words were drowned out by the bull-shout of Carlos.

"To the pits with them!" the ruler roared. "Before they die, let them learn what it means to work!"

"No!" Webb protested bitterly. "I'll go to your pits, whatever they are, but not Lynn. You can't send her. She's a woman."

Carlos' face was dark with anger at this defiance. "Man or woman, it makes no difference." He lifted the gray tube that he carried. "One more word out of you and I'll blast you where you stand!"

In the face of that deadly threat, Webb had no choice. Herded by Thomas, with his tube always ready in his hands, the two bewildered astronomers from the observatory, Ethan and Webb, the latter with Lynn clinging to him, began a sullen march across the barren surface. They passed into the huge, forbidding powerhouses, there was a terrifying moment of treading a catwalk over shrieking dynamos, and then they came into the great circular roofless building surrounding the pits. They passed a small pit, were forced to walk on the edge of the great circular hole that was being dug. Aghast they stood on the edge and looked down.

There was a sickness in Webb's body. The dryness of his lips seemed to go all through him, sucking the blood from his veins. The two astronomers were white. Ethan Riley narrowed his eyes to slits. Lynn gulped once, an involuntary, final tremor convulsed her body.

Webb could not tear his gaze from the scene. The shiny black walls of the pit sloped away from under their feet, dropped precipitously through solid granite to the bottom where forty or fifty men were dragging themselves about. They were working with funnel-shaped tools that sprayed greenish light on the granite. Wherever the light touched, the tough stone would slowly dissolve into choking fumes that rose in a mist from the hole. From where they were standing they could hear racking coughs from the men slaving in the fumes.

The harsh voice of Thomas ripped out behind them. "Here's your disintegrators," he snapped. "Go down to the bottom by the ledge. And you'll last longer if you don't try to use these disintegrators on any of us. They have a range of six feet. Ours are good for miles."

They took the small, heavy, funnel-shaped tools. Pierson fingered his uncertainly. Pierson was slight, and baldish, and he was so frail that a puff of wind would blow him away. Webb had known the little

*In the ruler's words is found the explanation of the mad phenomena that caused so much trouble on earth. The planet was being shifted out of its orbit! That shifting would cause high tides and earthquakes and the violent fury of storms due to atmospheric disturbances. It would cause the clocks of earth, measured for accuracy against the motion of the distant stars, to seem to lose time.—Ed.

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astronomer for two years. He caught his breath when he saw Pierson fingering the tool that had been handed to him, and cried out a sharp warning.

The words came too late. Abruptly, gathering strength from some secret inward place, Pierson, ignoring the blunt warning from the Sirian, pressed the knob that controlled the discharge of the greenish ray and pointed it straight at Thomas.

The Sirian leaped back out of range. His face dark with rage, his tentacled eyes gleaming wickedly, he lifted his own weapon. Between it and Pierson's body shuttled a path of gleaming particles of matter.

Instantly a change came over the man. Webb gasped as he saw what was happening!

He was seeing Pierson as though he were made of jelly! His bones were visible as those of a skeleton. The jelly quivered into nothingness, the bones vanished with the abrupt suddenness of a light that has been turned out.

Pierson was gone. A little swirl of dust drifted where he had stood.

And Thomas was shouting, "Down to the bottom of the pit, or I'll blast all of you!"

The alien faced them, red tentacle eyes gleaming, his body hunched forward, his deadly weapon ready. Groaning, they trudged down the ledge. But Webb Saunders went with quickening pulse. He had seen something that might mean their salvation!

In the spot where Pierson had died there lay a gold watch, a gold ring, some gold dental work, and a gold chain. Gold was impervious to the weapons of the invaders. Armored in the rare metal, a handful of men might overcome them!

But where were they to get gold in this cursed place?

CHAPTER V

The Pit

AT the bottom of the ledge, a tall figure in a tattered uniform looked up at them. He coughed out the words. "Hello, Riley. . . ."

Ethan Riley started when he heard his name spoken. "Gerrin! You piloted one of the liners that crashed ten days ago. How did you get here?"

Gerrin grinned feebly. "Probably the same way you did," he answered. "The air fell right out from under the ship. These devils can create a vast suction that literally pulls the air out from under a plane, and the ship, deprived of its supporting air, falls like a rock. Of course they could destroy any plane they wanted with their space ships, but they prefer not to do that, for the pilots would see them coming and radio a warning. Instead they lurk in the clouds and pull the plane down to earth!"

"So that's how they work it," Riley grunted.

"Yeah," Gerrin coughed. A fleck of blood appeared on his lips. He wiped it away and coughed again. "Lungs . . . don't last long . . . in these damned fumes," he muttered. He shook his fist upward. "If ever I get my hands on you devils . . . Look out!" he shouted hoarsely, stumbling to one side.

A luminous path suddenly appeared through the mist. Gerrin staggered out of the way and the blazing light struck the granite. The tough rock crackled and blistered like burning paint, dissolved in a hole about two feet deep and the size of a barrel-head. The light winked out.

"That was Thomas," was Gerrin's sullen remark. "He thinks it's fun to lurk above us and pick off the stragglers. But if you keep on the move, you'll be all right. Be sure and keep moving, though, for he won't miss again."

Sullenly they began using the disintegrators on the stone. Reeling in the sickening fumes, coughing, they kept working. Lynn, now that her fright was over, now that she knew the terror they were facing, seemed to regain her courage. She kept her chin up, tried to stifle her coughs, and tried to smile. Webb's heart ached when he saw that smile. . . . He would have given his life to know that Lynn was safe at home. But she was here. *Here!* And even if she had been home, for how long would she have been safe? How long before the earth was swept away from the sun and the awful cold of outer space began to seep in through the blankets of the atmosphere, chilling, eventually freezing all life on the planet?

Not long, he learned from the workers. Not over two weeks. As soon as this pit was finished and the machinery installed in it.

Webb learned what was to go into this pit. A wheel! Nothing but a gigantic wheel!

"It's a gyroscope," Gerrin coughed out. "They've already got one gyroscope in operation, and they've used it to start the earth from its orbit, but they need two to break the gravitational force of the sun and hurl the earth, like a rock on the end of a string, out into space. . . ."

A gyroscope! Men had long been familiar with the strange force generated by a spinning wheel. Men had used that force, beneficently, to steady the plunging of their ocean liners, to hold their airplanes steady. Men had used that force for good. But it could be used for evil. It could be used, given a wheel sufficiently large, to hurl the earth out of its orbit. It was being used for that purpose!

"We've got to stop the gyroscope that is already running!" Webb rasped. "We've got to prevent them from installing one in this pit!"

Gerrin grunted. "Don't forget we're caught like rats in a trap! I've racked my brain ever since I've been here and I haven't been able to think of any way to stop these devils."

"What about these disintegrators we're using? Thomas said they only have a range of six feet. If there was some way to increase their range. . . ."

Turning it off, he began to examine the disintegrator. The funnel-shaped mouth gave him no clue. He was beginning to examine the heavy handle when

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Gerrin saw what he was doing.

"Stop that!" the aviator rasped, his eyes jerking up through the fumes toward the top of the pit. "If they see you taking one of those tools apart—Duck! Thomas has seen you!"

Webb leaped to one side. The blistering beam bored down through the murky fumes and smashed into the spot where he had been standing. It followed him as he skipped through the fumes. Finally it was turned off. A hollow voice roared down at him.

"Keep working, earthman. Keep your disintegrator in operation."

Webb turned it on again, began beaming the granite. But from what Gerrin and the other captives told him—three men had been killed for attempting to examine the disintegrators—and from the sharp watch that Thomas kept over him after that, Webb suspected that there was a way to increase the force of the disintegrators. If he only had a chance to find it!

BUT he didn't have that chance. The hours slowly dragged by. Under his feet he could feel the throbbing vibration of a giant gyroscope that was turning somewhere in a vast hollowed out cavern. A gyroscope that, every second, was lifting earth farther and farther from her orbit. Soon there would be another gyroscope turning in the very pit where he was digging.

The knowledge that he was being forced to aid the vicious plan of the Sirian invaders was as bitter as the searing fumes he breathed. And every time he heard Lynn Carter cough, his sullen anger surged to greater heights. Somehow he must stop these devils. But how? If he could only examine the disintegrators. If he only had enough gold to construct an armor that would be impervious to their rays. If he only had some of the gold buried in vaults in Kentucky! The bitterness of that thought was gall to him—millions of dollars in the yellow metal lying useless, when it might be the one factor essential to save the earth from becoming a mere balance wheel in the solar system of Sirius, eight light years across the void of space.

Then a heavy figure loomed up through the fumes and a harsh voice grated. "You, earthman, we want you."

It was Thomas. His deadly weapon was pointing straight at Webb.

"What do you want?" Webb snapped. He tensed his muscles. If they were going to kill him, he would die fighting anyhow. A quick leap might carry him near enough to the bulky Sirian for his short range disintegrator to work effectively.

"One of the generators in the powerhouse needs cleaning," came the answer. "Carlos suggested you. Bring your work tool and come with me."

So they had another job for him! Webb did not need to be told that any job they had selected would probably be suicidal, that Thomas was ordering him to his death. Grimly, he grasped the work tool, and preceded the watchful Sirian toward the edge of the pit.

Through the fumes a slender figure ran to him. "Webb! Webb! Where are they taking you?"

Gently he pushed her from him. "Haven't you heard?" he tried to grin. "I'm being promoted."

Promoted to his death, he thought, as he trudged to the ledge. But there was nothing to be gained in telling Lynn. She was already sick enough without knowing that he was probably going to his death.

As he neared the ledge he passed Ethan Riley. "If I get a chance, I'm making a break," he whispered fiercely, for Ethan's ears alone. "And if I succeed, I'll come back fighting!"

WEBB, with Thomas walking stolidly behind him, entered a huge building. Entering, his clothes were whipped fiercely by a mighty wind. A high shrill scream filled the room. The place echoed with the pulsing throb of mighty forces under leash.

Eight tremendous generators were lined up in a row. They towered at least ten stories high. Gigantic field coils circled around huge, madly whirling rotors. The coils rose up fifty feet in the air.

Thomas' heavy voice came dimly over the fury of sound that lashed through this gigantic cavern. "An unpleasant duty, but a necessary one. With your tool, you will climb the ladders through the field coils and clean out the dust that collects in them and threatens to interfere with the efficiency of their operation. In places you will find it hangs like stalagmites. One thing: Keep a firm grip on the ladder. The last man who tried to clean the coils, slipped and fell directly into the rotor beneath—perhaps you may find bits of him scattered through the coils."

And in the wake of his words, Webb was moving slowly to the ladder of the first generator, going to what meant almost certain death!

CHAPTER VI

Doomed

THE minutes stretched out into an endless interval of screaming wind, of dust-laden gales that threatened to tear his grasp from the ladder and precipitate him into the roaring rotor a few feet below him. His hair, his eyes, his nose were clogged with stifling fine dust particles, drawn inward by the force of the suction. Slowly he began using his disintegrator, blasting the dust that collected between the field coils.

Looking down he could barely discern Thomas. The Sirian was examining the cables that led from the generators. Now was his chance to see how that disintegrator worked. If he didn't find out—well, he had barely enough strength left to cling to the ladder. Another five minutes would see him slip into the rotor roaring beneath him.

Hooking an arm over a rung of the ladder, he com-

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menced unscrewing the back of the funnel-shaped tool. On what he would find there, his life depended.

The back came off. The workings were simple. A battery of tiny tubes vaguely resembling a cathode tube sent a stream of destructive electrons down the funnel. Gingerly, with the back of the tool unscrewed, Webb pressed the trigger.

The same green glow came from the funnel. But, looking at the butt of the tool, Webb saw that all of the tubes were not working. Only about a third of them reacted! In a flash he was fingering the connections. He saw where wires had been disconnected from the tubes that did not react. He reconnected the wires. Once more he tried the disintegrator.

Tiny lights winked on in all of the tubes. And he could barely hold the tool in his hands as the recoil jerked it backward. Magically, a hole yawned in the iron housing of the field coils.

It worked! At full power! Its range had been enormously increased. Now he had a weapon that he could use.

Grimly, Webb screwed the back on the tool. New strength seemed to flow through his body. He turned, and disregarding the awful chances of slipping and falling into the rotor, worked his way back down the ladder.

Thomas had his back turned. The Sirian was still examining the cables.

"I wouldn't shoot a dog in the back!" Webb grated. "Turn around!"

The bulky figure whirled like a spinning top, hand leaping for his weapon. The tentacled eyes gaped in fear.

"This," said Webb, "is for McDuff Traffern!"

He pressed the trigger. A glow of bursting electrons leaped at the Sirian. They ripped into the bulky space suit that he wore, smashed through it, and into the flesh beneath. Webb felt a savage exultation as the clawing Sirian fell. The nauseous reek of ammonia that poured from the punctured space suit even smelled good.

Leaving the dying creature writhing on the floor, Webb dashed for the door by which he had entered. If he could get back to the pit and with his powerful weapon. He held the Sirians at bay while the captives changed their tools so they would operate at full power! If—that was his plan. He might die in the execution of his plan, but if he could tell the captives how to increase the power of their tools and could hold the Sirians at bay while the prisoners changed the connections, earth would have a chance to escape from the destruction that threatened it.

He dashed out of the door that led to the pit, took one look, and groaned. There were dozens of the Sirians between him and the pit. Even if they hadn't seen him, the odds against him were at least thirty to one.

"To hell with the odds!" he thought. "I've got to get through!"

With the tool working at full power, he suddenly sprayed the greenish ray over the Sirians. Some of them went down. But the others, alarmed at the cries of their fellows, whirled to face this earthman who had run amok. Their hands grabbed at their weapons. Webb sprayed them. A bolt of light lanced at him, missed him by inches. Another came.

He saw he couldn't get through. Certain death waited for him out there. He turned, raced quickly back to the protection of the powerhouse, and as he raced through the door he saw the remaining Sirians running toward the door.

He knew, as he entered the building, that he was running into a trap. His only hope was to go through the powerhouse. He raced between the massive, roaring generators, but before he got across the huge chamber, he heard shouts of Sirians coming from behind him.

"Maybe this will hold you for a while!" he thought, turning his weapon into the heart of the nearest generator.

IF he had pointed the gun at so much dynamite the effect could not have been more explosive. His ray ate the heart out of the whirling rotor, and the fragments, turning at terrific speed, exploded outward with the violence of a shell from a sixteen inch gun. They smashed into the roof of the cavern, sprayed the walls with shattering chunks of steel. The savage cries of the Sirians changed to wild alarm. Among the thudding fragments, Webb raced across the powerhouse, looked out, and saw—

Three small Sirian space ships. And the one nearest him was empty. A break at last.

With a silent prayer, Webb sprinted for the nearest ship. Unobserved, he climbed into it, slammed the door behind him, locked it.

Certain features of the controls were obvious. A rheostat for an accelerator, a lever for each rocket tube, the typewriter-like instrument panel that controlled the direction of flight. As he desperately tried to remember how Thomas had operated those controls, with cold suddenness his ears caught a cry from outside.

One startled glance he took. Sirians were streaming from the powerhouse. From the other direction they were running across the granite floor of the cavern toward him. And the crew of the other two ships had seen him.

He dived into the controls. He was not certain how the ship operated but he had no time to make sure. He began punching keys.

There was a blast from the back of the ship that sent it into crazy gyrations. In the floor beneath his feet, motors roared to life. And the ship leaped up, up into the air of the cavern. Desperately he worked the controls, found how to change the direction of flight, and levelled off.

Below him, on the granite floor of the cavern, the Sirians were looking up. They were pointing disin-

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tegrators at him. Only the erratic motion of the ship saved him from being struck.

He tried to turn back, to fly over the powerhouse and down to the pit. Somehow he had to get to those prisoners. With the ship he could hold the Sirians at bay long enough to tell the captives what to do.

As he yanked the vessel in a steep circle and started back, he saw the two Sirian ships take to the air from in front of the powerhouse. His way to the pit was cut off.

He was caught between two fires. He could not reach the pit with those ships facing him. The only other hope was to go in the other direction, to try to reach the huge hole that led upward to the surface. Grimly he yanked the vessel in another circle and as he turned he saw the black mass of Sirians blocking his way to the exit. Their disintegrators raised, they were waiting for him.

There was no escaping their fire, for they blocked the way to the exit. If he flew high above them, up near the roof of the cavern, they would be sure to get him. He sent the nose of the ship down, settled the ship into screaming flight a few feet above the surface of the cavern. He drew his own disintegrator and trained it on the waiting Sirians. They were stationary targets, he was a moving one. On that fact his thin hopes were founded.

Even as he pulled the trigger, firing through the glass of the control cabin, a beam stabbed at him, touched the ship momentarily. The ship lurched sickeningly, brushed the ground, leaped again into the air like a kangaroo. Webb fired through the glass. Ahead of him the Sirians answered his fire. From behind him ships blasted at him.

Only his speed and the crazy gyrations of the ship saved him. Holes appeared in the glass as the Sirian death rays struck. But none struck him and none struck vital operating equipment.

With the memory of that crazy bounce the ship had taken when it brushed the floor of the huge cavern, Webb decided on a desperate expedient. He was playing fast and loose with death, and he knew it, but there was no other way. When the Syrians were looming close ahead of him, he nosed the ship down again. The Sirians, thinking he was deliberately trying to crash in their midst, opened a lane. Webb held his breath. The ship lurched as it struck the floor of the cavern. Flying with the speed of a meteor, it struck the floor and bounced up! Up and over the waiting Sirians like a flash of light.

The mad leap disconcerted them, ruined their aim. Before they could bring their weapons to play on him, Webb Saunders was in the huge tunnel that led upward to the open sky, driving the ship outward like a ball from the mouth of a cannon.

Wild exultation shook him. He had escaped. He was in the tunnel heading out. Now men and ships could come back down that hole, with bombs and machine guns, and blow the living hell out of these invaders. With a groan he realized that no airship manufactured on earth could fly in the fierce air currents in the shaft. Men could not fly downward. And they could not drop bombs from above, for the bombs, if they destroyed the Sirians, would also destroy the men held captive in that hole.

He had escaped! But even so, what could he do to thwart the Sirians? They were underground, in gigantic caverns. From the safety of that hole, they could work their gyroscopes. And nothing could be done about it. Even if he had escaped, even if he warned earth, the situation was still desperate. Then he looked back, and he saw that he hadn't escaped. Two Sirian ships were driving up after him.

CHAPTER VII

The Gyroscopes Are Finished

TO Lynn Carter the six days that passed after Webb made his mad attempt to escape were horrible nightmares. She did not know whether he had escaped or whether he had been killed. The Sirians told the captives nothing. She had one reason for even hoping that Webb was alive; for four days the Sirians had kept ships constantly on guard at the mouth of the tunnel. Then the ships had been removed as if all danger was past.

And the Sirians drove the prisoners mercilessly, forcing them to complete in less than half the allotted time their gigantic undertaking. Gerrin had gone mad. With a red spray coughing from his lungs, he had turned against the Sirians. He had been beamed to death. After that, Riley had stayed as close to Lynn as he could. The gaunt, coughing flier was trying his best to protect her. Always he assured her that Webb had escaped.

"He'll be back," Riley would say. "You couldn't kill that monkey with a lousy beam. He'll be back here with the army and the air force at his heels, and there will be hell popping in these parts!"

Lynn knew Riley was lying. She knew no aircraft could get down that tunnel, even if Webb had escaped.

The pit had been finished. On the sixth day the gigantic wheel of the second gyroscope was installed. The Sirians themselves worked with mad strength. And they drove their captives mercilessly.

The smashed generator had been repaired. Everything was finished. The second gyroscope, which was to hurl earth forever from the solar system, was ready to turn. Carlos placed his hand on the switch, ready to turn current into the vast mechanism.

Exultant cries of the Sirians echoed through the caverns. Their job was finished. Soon their system would have the much needed balance wheel. If, in gaining that balance wheel, they destroyed a flowering civilization, the Sirians did not care.

Carlos held up his hand. Except for the roaring winds and the throbbing of the vast powerhouse, there was expectant silence in the caverns.

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"Our work is done," Carlos said. The wan prisoners, no longer in the pit, heard his words of doom.

Even as he started to press home the switch, a distant roar echoed through the caverns. Every eye glanced upward. Riley gasped. "My God, an earthquake. To be trapped in here. . . ."

Carlos slammed home the switch. Throbbing and humming the gigantic gyroscope began to turn. Hours later it would reach full speed.

"Time grows short," Carlos rapped out. "Even now the outer crust of your world threatens to crumble. Our work done, we will leave your bodies to guard this cavern." His loose-mouthed grin was matched by all the Sirians.

Then there was that low roar again. Every man's heart slowed. They looked. Swimming down over the powerhouse, exploding its rocket tubes in a sound that was the same as the low roar they had thought was an earthquake, was a Sirian ship, armored in gleaming yellow gold!

"IT'S Webb!" Riley shouted. "He's back, in a ship armored with gold and loaded to the gills with *fighting men*!"

Gold! The one metal that was impervious to the disintegrators of the Sirians.

Madness seized the caverns. Carlos bellowed orders. Sirians raced toward their ships, already drawn up and waiting for their trip from earth. Others grabbed their hand guns, waited for the oncoming ship.

All this Webb Saunders saw as he nosed his Sirian flier down toward the floor of the caverns. His veins flowed with liquid fire as he saw the culmination of six days of desperate planning, hoping, fighting to construct an armor of gold leaf to turn the death rays. . . . One tiny ship, twenty men crammed in it. . . . Could they defeat a force ten times as large?

The ship grated on the floor. Webb kicked open the door, and leaped out, his fighters surging behind him. He carried the Sirian disintegrator with him. The others carried snub-nosed machine guns, hand grenades, all of the weapons gold plated. And all of the men were armored in gold from the vaults of Fort Knox, in Kentucky.

A roar leaped from the fighters.

"Give 'em hell!" Webb shouted. The thunder of Tommy-guns drowned his words. Hot lead thundered at the Sirians, tore through the bulky space suits they wore. Kicking and threshing the front ranks of the invaders went down.

The Sirians were massed into a solid block. Carlos lurked in the background, shouting orders. When the stutter of the Tommy-guns came he shouted to his fighters to drop to the ground. The front rank had already fallen. But the second rank took refuge behind the fallen bodies and from that protection they poured out a stream of green rays.

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The ground boiled around the pitifully small band. Oddly, Webb noticed that wherever the rays touched his armor, it was scoured bright. He saw the Sirians taking refuge behind the fallen bodies and he lifted his disintegrator. He would blast those fallen bodies into nothingness. He squeezed the trigger. In the next moment he was jiggling it frantically. It would not respond.

He flung it from him. Somehow it had become damaged on the trip. The death rays, scouring around him, suddenly ceased. He looked up as he heard Carlos bellow an order.

Many of the Sirians were threshing on the ground. The odor of ammonia came to Webb's nostrils. But the Sirians who were not hurt were not answering the blazing fire of the earthmen. They were fumbling with their weapons. Puzzled, Webb watched. Then his heart seemed to stop as the Sirians brought their weapons into play once more, a peculiar red lens fixed on the end of each.

Shock struck Webb solidly as the death rays came again. He felt a tingling through his armor, above his right knee. Glancing down, he saw a pattern of tiny pin holes appeared.

"Lord!" he groaned. "Now they can pierce even gold."

The thought came to him that at least it would be quick. He waited the searing bite of the death ray. He had failed. He had brought twenty more men to their death. And he hadn't saved the earth! Desperately his glance roamed over the scene. He saw his own men beginning to fall about him, he got one glimpse of the prisoners huddling to one side. His gaze traveled to the side, to the powerhouse. . . . Powerhouse!

The word rang in his mind like a fire-bell. Powerhouse! Generators. If, before he died, he could only smash those generators. . . .

THE next moment he was running across the field toward the nearest fallen Sirian. Hot lead and death rays splattered about him. He fell twice as he felt the stinging rays reach through his armor and he discovered that they did not penetrate gold unless they were concentrated on it for a second or so. Behind him his men were making the same discovery and were skipping and hopping and firing at the same time.

Then Webb scooped up a Sirian weapon. He shot a bolt of force into a Sirian who tried to stop him. He saw the invader explode into green vapor. He thought of trying to finish the battle right here—and gave up the idea as a numbness crept into his arm. Swiftly he spun about and raced toward the huge powerhouse. Behind him raced quick steps. He flashed a hurried glance and saw Carlos coming behind him. Carlos had divined his intention, was firing at him from the rear. He tried to fire at the Sirian but Carlos ducked like a cat.

As Webb reached the door of the powerhouse, the steps melted away under him. He crawled over the boiling debris into the door, got one glimpse of the giant generators. He turned his disintegrator into the nearest one, and the explosion that followed split heaven and earth! A section of the ceiling crashed down, barely missing Webb. His lips were tight over his teeth as he ran toward the next generator. He took two steps forward and leveled his gun. Nor did he stop when the snarling voice of Carlos split through the thunder.

"Stop, you fool!"

Webb's head bowed under the blast of the weapon. A surging numbness shook him from head to foot. His brain reeled. As he sprawled downward an inner force made him whirl.

Carlos stalked nearer, raising his weapon to finish this earthman. Webb's weapon swept up. In the dim haze that danced before his eyes, he saw the green ray strike the Sirian.

Terror and pain convulsed the frog-like face into an awful death mask. Life rushed from his body as he sprawled downward to the floor.

Carlos was dead! Carlos was dead! The thought flashed through Webb's mind. But the generators of the Sirians still turned, and as long as they produced current, the giant gyroscopes would hurl earth farther and farther away from the sun. Webb tried to stand up, but found his legs would not work. Lying on the floor, he sprayed the disintegrator over the powerhouse.

The floor heaved with the force of the explosions as the spinning rotors ripped themselves free from their housings. The last explosion died away, as the last generator stopped turning.

FROM outside the powerhouse there came a vast humming. Webb crawled to the door. Only three of the twenty men he had brought with him remained on their feet. They were looking up.

Across the floor Ethan Riley came running toward him.

"They're escaping!" Riley shouted. "When the generators stopped they ran to their ships. If they get out of here, we'll have to fight them all over again."

Webb forced himself to speak. "Half the heavy artillery of the army is lined up outside of this hole. When those ships come out—they will run into a hail of steel that will blow them out of existence. . . . I fixed it up with the army so we wouldn't have to fight those devils again. . . ."

He sighed. A blackness moved into his vision, obscured his sight.

An hour later he returned to consciousness to find soft hands rubbing his face. He looked up into the blue eyes of Lynn Carter. Above her, he saw the grinning face of Riley.

"A whole world will be thanking you tomorrow," Lynn whispered. "All the gold it took to defeat Carlos couldn't pay you back."

(continued on page 47)

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Dr. Joseph Murphy, Minister of the Church of Divine Science, Shows You —

HOW TO PRAY AND GROW RICH!

We have been instructed by Dr. Joseph Murphy to give you the most exciting news you've ever heard — news of his amazing discovery of: **how to pray and grow rich!**

And Dr. Murphy promises you results not in a year — not in a month — not in a week — but immediately. Yes, says Dr. Murphy, "my prayer techniques will bring you immediate results!"

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You say this is too much for you to believe . . . that it's too good to be true? Well then, can you explain the astonishing things that happened after people used Dr. Murphy's prayer techniques? Can you explain —

(1) how numerous people make use of a certain formula for paying bills with marvelous results (p. 37)

(2) how a poverty-stricken couple received $10,000 "out of the blue" in response to their request (p. 25)

(3) how a man was able to triple his income in three months with a certain 28-word prayer that takes only ten seconds to repeat (p. 98)

(4) how L.T. used a one sentence prayer to rise from a job as an office boy to the owner of a 50 million dollar company (p. 178)

. . . or explain any one of the scores of wonderful things that happened to people who used Dr. Murphy's prayer techniques!

But we assure you that you won't be able to explain a single one of these mysterious "answered prayers" — you won't that is, until you read Dr. Murphy's thrilling new book "YOUR INFINITE POWER TO BE RICH" . . .

● On page 6 of Dr. Murphy's book, you will find these exciting words:

"All of the case histories presented in my book are of men and women who became rich by using the mental and spiritual laws described in it . . . these people belong to ALL religious denominations . . . they come from every income bracket and social level. All of these people have amassed great wealth!"

● On page 24, you'll read of a woman out of work, trying to support three children, with the bills piling up rapidly. No sooner did she utilize a single prayer given to her by Dr. Murphy than a surprise gift of $5,000 in cash came out of the blue, from an almost forgotten relative she had not seen for 15 years!

● On page 98, you'll discover how a working man TRIPLED his income in just three months, through the power of a certain prayer. This prayer contains 28 words. It takes only ten seconds to repeat. **You will find this prayer given word for word in the book.**

● On page 109, you'll read the true story of Maria, a little 8-year-old Spanish girl in New York, who wanted nothing in all the world more than a new bicycle. Her parents could not afford such a gift, but Dr. Murphy, who was then her next-door neighbor taught her how to Ask . . . **and her prayer was answered . . . she got her brand-new bicycle ONE DAY LATER.**

THERE IS NOTHING IN LIFE THAT CANNOT BE YOURS, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO ASK FOR IT —

These are only a brief sample of the scores of true, heart-warming and moving case-histories of the power of Living Prayer in action. Dr. Murphy's book, called "YOUR INFINITE POWER TO BE RICH", gives you the full techniques with which you can contact the Power capable of answering your every need.

You will find these powerful prayer-techniques truly beautiful, reverent and inspiring. **And you will find out for yourself that — incredible as it may seem — THESE PRAYERS DO WORK.** They ARE answered! Time and time again, skeptics have tried — simply tried — and found to their utter amazement that Dr. Murphy truly has in his hands the lost key to a Bible secret forgotten for ages.

We do NOT expect you to take our unsupported word for this. We urge you to PROVE TO YOURSELF, our words are true. We want to put a copy of Dr. Murphy's book into your hands. All we ask is that you TRY — just try — using one of these prayers. Fill out and return the coupon below.

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The Man From Hell

By POLTON CROSS

Dale Bradfield discovered atomic power, and was prepared to give the world the greatest of gifts. Then he was murdered and atomic power fell into the ruthless hands of Marvin Brant

CHAPTER I
Murder!

"GENTLEMEN, atomic power is ours! As you are all aware I lodged with Dr. Carson yesterday the results of my five years' research into the mysteries of atomic power. For next to no cost we can provide every city in the world with light, heat, and power. . . . And note these words, gentlemen! We have in our hands the greatest power man has ever known. It is born into a world crammed to the doors with diabolical armaments of every description. We all know how disastrously the attempt at world disarmament of 1970 ended. It is up to us to defy temptation. We must overrule the lust for barbarism and keep in check the desire for world-control which atomic force could certainly give us. I give my discovery to the world that it might benefit the world. . . . No more, no less."

Dake Bradfield stopped speaking, his powerful hands resting on the broad table on the speaker's platform. Then he stood upright, hands going to his hips, massive dark head thrown back. His piercing blue eyes passed swiftly over the faces of the hundred men gathered before him. For a moment he was conscious of the supreme power he represented. He of all men, son of a scientist, still only thirty-six years old, had done what all other men had failed to do—mastered the mystery of atomic power. His firm lips curved in a smile.

"I have nothing further to add, gentlemen," he stated quietly, and sat down amidst a roar of applause.

But Dake Bradfield was not concerned with the eulogy: he was trying to efface from his mind the possible consequences of his discovery. Again he wondered if a world stalemated with arms was a safe place into which to bring atomic power. But the thing was done now! The formula was in the hands of Dr. Carson, respected President of the Scientific Research Association. Only he, Bradfield, and Elford—Secretary General to the Association—knew what the formula was about. But suppose there was a slip-up somewhere—

This was thinking too far ahead! Dake Bradfield forced his thoughts to the moment, was glad when the convention was at last over and he could escape outside into the great marble corridors of the Association Building.

HE looked round eagerly amidst the swirling variety of people, nor was he disappointed. Presently, a slim auburn-haired girl in trim walking costume disentangled herself from the delegates and pressmen and came forward.

"Dake, you are marvelous!" she exclaimed, her dark eyes shining in admiration. "I heard it all over the relay speakers, of course. You predicted you would knock them cold—and you did! I'm proud of you, dear."

Dake smiled, drew her arm through his. "The opinions of Sheila Carson matter more to me than all the vaporings of delegates," he murmured. "If you think that, your father must think so as well. And since your father is my boss it sorta works out."

They walked slowly along for a moment or two down the hall, then Dake spoke again.

"If every guy in the world had a girl like you to help him, we might have less bitterness," he sighed. "Did you ever stop to think that you've wasted the best part of your life waiting for me?"

Sheila wrinkled her nose. "Well, you said you were too busy to marry me and settle down—and since you've proved your point now what does it matter? After all, our marriage is an insignificant thing compared to the discovery of atomic force. . . ." She broke off suddenly and gave him an indignant glance. "Say, what do you mean?—wasted the best part of my life? I'm seven years younger than you, remember. I'm no faded blossom yet!"

"Nope, I guess not," Dake amended. "Only I think sometimes I've been a bit of a heel making you wait. But now it's all finished with," he went on intensely, his blue eyes shining. "We'll be married tomorrow! We'll take a honeymoon for a vacation. God knows, I need one!"

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"Tomorrow! But—but—"

"Special license. And no arguments! The best way to celebrate my success is to marry you. Now let's go and grab a bite to eat."

They turned away swiftly towards the dining rooms, unaware that the expressionless eyes of Elford, Secretary General to the Association, watched them go. Elford turned, a small and impassive enigma of a man, and walked unhurriedly out of the building.

ON THE topmost floor of the gigantic Brant Steel Corporation Building in the heart of New York reposed the sumptuous office of Marvin Brant himself, President of the Corporation, multimillionaire, autocrat, and quasidictator of America's teeming millions of average workers.

At the moment Brant was pacing his office very slowly with his plump hands locked behind him. He was a bullock of a man with vastly wide shoulders and the face of a champion bulldog. His hair though thinning was still raven black, an excellent testification to the iron strength of body that had lifted him from a smelting foundry to consummate power and wealth.

He paced his office as though he were alone, ignoring the man seated in the hide chair by the door. Not that the man seemed to mind. He smoked a cigarette leisurely and stared at the ceiling meditatively with steely bright gray eyes.

At last the desk buzzer sounded. Brant stopped his perambulations and snapped the switch.

"Well?" His voice was thick and husky, matching the folds of his heavy, pallid jowls.

"Mr. Jones to see you, sir."

"Send him right in."

Brant stood expectantly waiting, his keen eyes on the office door as 'Mr. Jones' came in. It was Secretary Elford. He glanced at the man in the chair, gave a calm nod of acknowledgment, then advanced to the desk.

"You heard and saw everything over the radio-televizor?" he asked the big man briefly.

"Naturally. What we're waiting for is your verification. *Has* this fellow Dake Bradfield *really* got atomic force?"

"No question of it," Elford replied in his level voice. "In the hands of the Science Association is the greatest power this world has ever seen, power which could have broken you down utterly, Brant, had you not had the wit to foresee what was coming."

The magnate's smile had no humor in it. "I sure had the right hunch when I engineered you the job as the Association's Secretary. In five years you have become installed as the essence of honor. It has been well worth the wait. Naturally you know where this formula is?"

"Do I!" Elford echoed, his pale eyes shining. "As the Secretary, Dr. Carson handed it over to me. It is entirely in my hands, and all you have to do, Brant, is pay me the sum agreed upon and the formula is yours. There are no copies of it, except in Bradfield's own brain. Once I have taken the formula I shall vanish from the Association and team up with you—But I needn't say any more."

"No . . ." Brant whispered.

HE sat down at his desk, rubbing his big paws together in grim exultancy. "At last we have it! Atomic power! What can we not do with that formula? I need it to save my own interests, yes—but we all need it for domination of the earth. You, Van Rutter, will use it for the creation of atomic shells, with which you will load our hidden air fleet in Europe . . ."

The man in the hide chair inclined his dark head. His lean, ascetic face was smiling twistedly. Henrich Van Rutter, of nationality unknown, was more than an arms magnate: his interests went beyond even the ruthless probings of Marvin Brant. But the two were inseparable because they knew each other's power.

"You, Elford, will take control of my own munition and science laboratories under this very building," Brant went on, turning to the Secretary suddenly. "You'll be safe enough. Nothing can get into my laboratories, nothing. And every man is to be trusted. Between us we can master the earth."

"Has this atomic force invention been tested by anybody else save Bradfield as yet?" asked Van Rutter sharply.

Elford shook his head. "He has given demonstrations, but our own scientists have yet to go to work. Bradfield's formula shows how to release atomic force for commercial purposes, but he has withheld the secret of how to make explosives from it. Not that that signifies anything: our scientists will soon discover what to do. That I believe has been Bradfield's main fear all along."

"Bradfield," said Brant slowly, "must disappear. I have it all arranged. As you know perhaps, Bradfield does not live in the city here. He prefers the privacy of a little isolated house two miles outside the metropolis. To reach his house he has to cover three miles of unmade road. That very fact makes him mainly immune from interference for an automobile cannot comfortably go along that road. Few people ever use it at all, in fact. Bradfield, my agents tell me, walks to and from his house every day to the city, probably for exercise. Tonight he will never reach home. He will be killed on the way."

"And what if the shot is heard?" Elford asked quietly.

The big man scowled. "Who in hell said anything about shooting? Give me time to finish, can't you! Bordering this unmade road on one side, in the midst of undeveloped land, are old mine workings. You remember the radium search in 1950 when some nut figured he'd found radium near here? Well, those disused workings are the result. Ultimately our friend Bradfield's body will be thrown down one of the mine shafts. But first he'll be strangled to death —soundlessly and efficiently. For that I shall engage

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my old friend Vanson, the one time Manhattan Strangler. He's a crook anyway, ready for the hot seat any time I say the word. He'll do any job for a reasonable sum."

"And if the police track it all down?" Van Rutter questioned.

"Can you imagine the police being very interested in the disappearance of Dake Bradfield when all their energies will be directed on trying to find a stolen atomic force formula?" Brant asked with calm cunning. "And even if they do get ambitious I can always find a convenient maniac to take the rap. Money can buy anything. It's better we use a common or garden way of killing Bradfield than anything elaborate. The more ordinary it is the more suspicion is deflected from us, even granting there is any at all. It's all so simple, gentlemen."

"Yes—I think you're right," Elford admitted finally.

"O.K., then, the rest is up to you. Get that formula!"

DAKE BRADFIELD'S mood was a happy one as he swung along that solitary country road between the metropolis and tiny garden city suburb where he had elected to make his home. He had left Sheila Carson in the city with a promise of an early arrival on the morrow. Then at last their long delayed marriage. Afterwards, the South Seas, Paris . . .

Dake whistled as he strolled along, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his navy blue overcoat. A cold full moon shone through lowering autumnal clouds. In the field to his right beyond the barbed wire fence reared the broken skeletons of the mine workings, relics of a brief period when man had thought radium was on his doorstep. Now it was atomic power: but that was no dream. It meant the start of a new age, an age of—

Suddenly Dake stopped in his tracks, conscious of a faint sound in the clinkery dust behind him. He twisted around, but at that identical moment something thin and strong dropped lightly round his neck and instantly drew taut. With a frantic desperation he lashed out at the massive form he could sense behind him.

His efforts were useless, not because he lacked strength but because he was at a disadvantage. Besides, that damned cord was crushing the wind out of his lungs. He pawed air helplessly, gulped and gargled, dropped heavily to his knees.

Tighter the cord constricted, and tighter. Dake felt his lungs turn to liquid fire: the moon span crazily before his eyes. Darkness swirled in upon him in a singing tide . . .

Vanson, the Manhattan Strangler, waited a while with the cord still in position, then at last he stooped and felt for his victim's heart. It had ceased to beat. Vanson smiled, pulled the cord away and thrust it in his pocket. For several seconds he stood looking down on the dead, tortured face in the moonlight.

"The easiest thousand smackers I ever earned," he commented thoughtfuly, then humming a tune to himself he lifted Dake's heavy body onto his broad shoulders, ducked under the barbed wire fence, walked steadily across the empty field toward the nearest mine working. At the top of the first shaft he stopped, released the body and stood listening.

Some seconds afterwards there floated back to him from the bottom of the shaft a faint squelching thud, announcing Dake had landed in the heavy mud at the bottom.

Vanson dusted his coat with calm movements, readjusted his hat, drew on loud yellow gloves as he strolled languidly back to the deserted roadway.

CHAPTER II

Sheila Makes a Discovery

THE FOLLOWING MORNING scare headlines blazed across the front of nearly every American newspaper—

ATOMIC FORCE SECRET STOLEN! INVENTOR DISAPPEARS! Then the full resume of facts, including the disappearance of Secretary General Elford from the Association. Had he too been killed and disposed of, like Dake Bradfield?

The police were suddenly thrown into desperate activity, working in collaboration with the Intelligence Service—but Brant had laid his plans well and diverted every clue into a blind alley that led nowhere. Certainly nobody suspected the steel magnate. He had, in the five years at his disposal, prepared for every possible eventuality. Nor for that matter did anybody doubt the character of Elford. It was pressumed he had met a violent and mysterious end in common with Bradfield.

Dr. Carson, slim gray headed chief of the Association, was at his wits' end with worry. Upon him rested the sole responsibility for the theft. It would mean ruthless enquiries, accusations, probably the loss of his position for negligence, though God knew it had not been his fault. The whole business was an utter mystery to him.

To Sheila the news had come as an overwhelming shock. This day should have been her wedding day, the happiest of her life, was the cruelest of all. All through the morning she remained in something approaching a daze, then toward noon she bestirred herself far enough to dress and go down town to see what events had transpired.

"Nothing—nothing at all," her father told her drearily, once she was within his private office. "Frankly, my dear, though you know my heart goes out to you in your own sadness, I am far more concerned over the theft of that formula than anything else—"

"It's Dake I'm thinking of!" Sheila broke in with sudden fierceness. "He's got to be found, dad! May-

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be he's been kidnapped or something. I just can't believe he's dead: it's too awful. . . Oh, what am I doing just sitting around talking? I—"

"Listen, Sheila—please!" Carson came round to her, looked earnestly into her tear stained face. "Dake's fate is only a small one when weighed in the balance with that formula theft. Do you not realize that it has fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous power? The very method of its theft shows that. There are no copies of that formula: they were to be made today, and Dake is the only man who knows all about it. He didn't even reveal the nature of his experiments to me. Oh, don't you see? There can even be war unless that formula is found! Dake's disappearance is matched against the possible slaughter of thousands of innocent people. Only a handful of police are engaged on trying to locate him and Elford. As the rest of the police, they're all looking for that formula. You must understand the situation, Sheila."

The girl nodded slowly, her lips tightening. "I understand all right, but the only thing that matters to me is Dake. I'm going to investigate for myself! I'm going over every inch of the route he must have taken to get home after leaving me last night. I've got to find him, dad ! He means everything in the world to me."

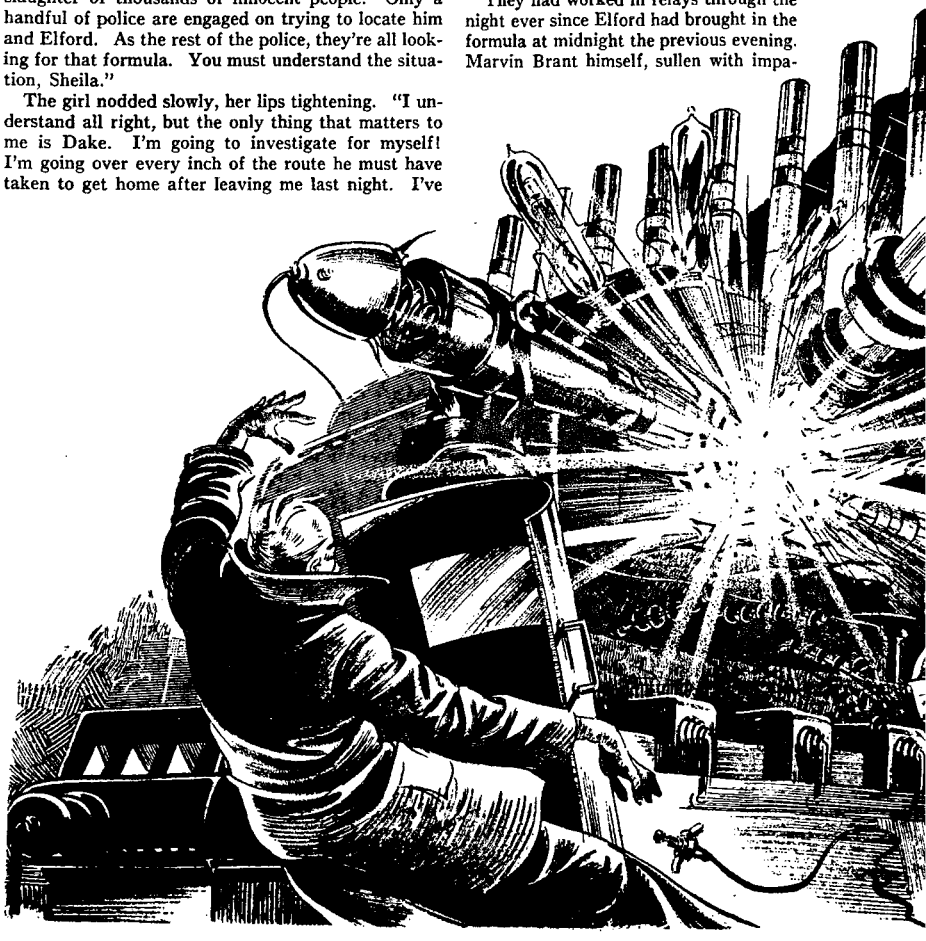
"But Sheila, there may be danger—"

"I'll risk it!" she retorted stubbornly, jumping to her feet. "I'm not waiting for the police, or for anybody. I'm starting right now!"

Carson relaxed as he watched her go. He knew it was useless to argue. She was too much like him for that.

IN THE immense laboratory of Marvin Brant, completely hidden from the world and safe from attack under the Brant building itself, protected by five foot walls and ceiling of concrete and steel, white-smocked technicians worked with steady industry.

They had worked in relays through the night ever since Elford had brought in the formula at midnight the previous evening. Marvin Brant himself, sullen with impa-



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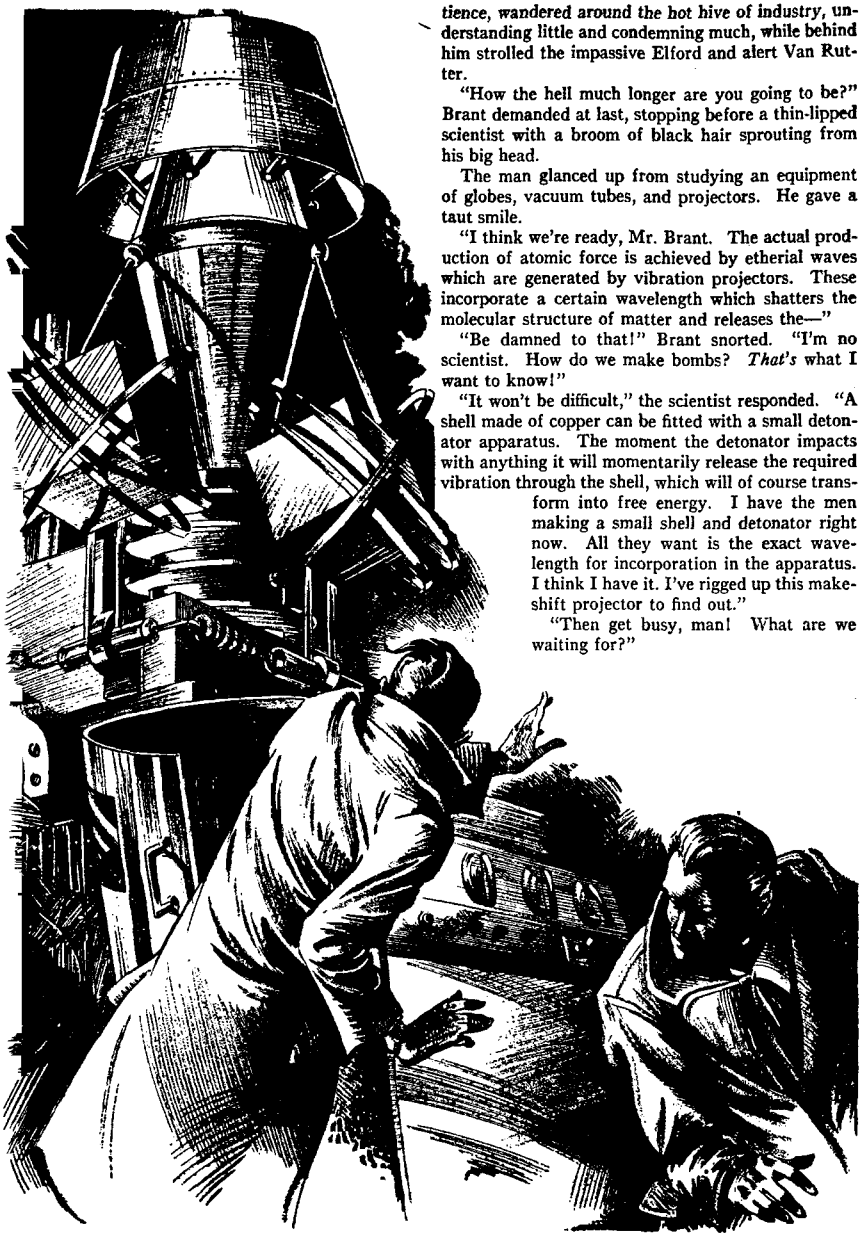

tience, wandered around the hot hive of industry, understanding little and condemning much, while behind him strolled the impassive Elford and alert Van Rutter.

"How the hell much longer are you going to be?" Brant demanded at last, stopping before a thin-lipped scientist with a broom of black hair sprouting from his big head.

The man glanced up from studying an equipment of globes, vacuum tubes, and projectors. He gave a taut smile.

"I think we're ready, Mr. Brant. The actual production of atomic force is achieved by etherial waves which are generated by vibration projectors. These incorporate a certain wavelength which shatters the molecular structure of matter and releases the—"

"Be damned to that!" Brant snorted. "I'm no scientist. How do we make bombs? *That's* what I want to know!"

"It won't be difficult," the scientist responded. "A shell made of copper can be fitted with a small detonator apparatus. The moment the detonator impacts with anything it will momentarily release the required vibration through the shell, which will of course transform into free energy. I have the men making a small shell and detonator right now. All they want is the exact wavelength for incorporation in the apparatus. I think I have it. I've rigged up this makeshift projector to find out."

"Then get busy, man! What are we waiting for?"

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The physicist nodded to the tiny grains on the receiving plate of the apparatus. "I'm going to disrupt those," he said briefly. "If Bradfield's calculations are right they will explode with plenty of violence, but the plate underneath will be untouched. I have got an insulating current running through it. You see, there is a wavelength which can protect as well as destroy, and—"

"Endicott, I pay you to show results, not to lecture," Brant broke in, with ominous calm. Then he glanced at the reddish dust in some perplexity. "You don't expect to get anything from this, do you?" he demanded. "What is it, anyway?"

"Copper dust." Endicott smiled grimly. "I fancy you will be a trifle surprised. Just stand back—all of you." He glanced across at the other technicians. "Ready, boys?"

THEY nodded, and got their distance. Endicott closed knife switches, his eyes on the receiving plate. Brant watched uneasily as the multiple tubes glowed brightly, as the lenses of the roughly erected projectors shone with unholy luminance—

Then suddenly all the men were slammed back against the wall by a blinding flash of light and stunning concussion. Noise struck deep into their eardrums, scorching wind singed their eyebrows and hair.

When finally the balls of fire had receded from before their eyes they found themselves staring at an apparatus in total ruins, a mass of twisted girders and broken plates.

"My God, what power!" Brant whispered. "It's unholy! You actually mean, Endicott, that that explosion came solely from that copper dust?"

The scientist nodded: he was looking thoughtful.

"We've got the wavelength all right, but we've also proved something else. I had hoped we could devise an atomic force projector to disrupt cities on the death-ray principle, but this shows it cannot be done. The projector itself shatters. Bradfield had a system of his own for manufacturing a metal impervious to the release of atomic force with which he intended to build generating plants. Those details are not given in the formula."

"I don't want projectors anyway: I want bombs," Brant breathed, clenching his fists. "I want the power to smash a city with one bomb, to hold a threat over the world. Eh, Van Rutter?"

"I am wondering," the arms king said, "where you intend to drop an experimental bomb? I presume it will be from an airplane?"

"Naturally." Brant gave a triumphant grin. "I have been planning again. We could drop our bomb in the ocean, only it might attract attention. Suppose though we dropped it near, or even on the mine workings where friend Bradfield met his death? Those old workings blow up now and again from fire-damp. One explosion more would not be considered strange, and at the same time we'd eliminate all traces of Bradfield who is lying, so Vanson told me, at the bottom of shaft number one. Simple, isn't it? And quite deserted around there too."

"Depends on the size of the bomb," said Elford, with a significant glance at the shattered apparatus.

"About half an inch diameter," Endicott remarked. "That will be ample for a test. Now I know the wavelength I can have it finished in another three hours."

Brant gave a slow nod and looked at Elford. "See to it that a plane is ready in three hours," he ordered. "A small bomber from my own flying ground will do. To carry four. . ."

IT WAS late afternoon when Sheila Carson reached the lonely road leading to the garden city suburb. She walked slowly, watching keenly as she went, but the landscape remained undisturbed. On one side of her was the high grass bank: on the other the field with the mine workings. Footprints there were none: the road was too full of hard ruts and clinkers for that.

For half an hour she wandered on. An hour went by— Then she paused, having covered perhaps a mile and a half in the time. Her gaze fixed itself to a piece of fabric clinging to the spike of the barbed wire fence bordering the mine field. In another moment she snatched it free, turned it over in her hands. Blue cloth? She recalled Dake's overcoat of the night before.

With a racing heart she looked around her, then finally toward the mine workings. Stooping, she eased herself through the fence and raced across the intervening stretch of muddy field, following as she went the heavy imprints of a man's boots. Heavy because he had carried somebody? It was a hunch far closer to truth than she realized.

But when she reached the mine workings it was a different matter. The skeleton towers of wood and steel loomed all around her. There were monstrous pyramids of disgorged earth, treacherous seams and crevices. She moved warily, calling as she went.

"Dake! Dake! Oh, *Da-ake!*"

That there was no reply did not deter her. One by one she looked down the deep shafts of the abysmal mines into the darkness at the bottom, until she picked up the footprints again and found them leading to a shaft somewhat separated from the others. With a vague giddiness rolling round her head she peered into the pit, hesitating. She knew she had found the right shaft, that Dake was possibly at the bottom of it despite the fact there was no answer to her call. But had she the nerve to venture down there, alone and unaided by rope?

It was as she stood there debating that a beating hum crept into her ears, growing steadily louder. In vague surprise she glanced up, frowning as she studied a small fast bomber flying directly over the mines, circling to keep them objectified. Though she was already practically concealed by the mine's tower

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some inner premonition warned her of danger. Gently she moved into the massive shadowed protection of a girder, stood watching interestedly.

She did not have to watch for long. Unexpectedly, she seemed to be suddenly flung in the midst of hell! The world in front of her opened up in blinding fire as the clear field just beyond the workings was riven with explosion. She was flung off her feet and hurled backward like a rag doll, landed face downward amidst earth and rubbish; her ears singing with the roar of the concussion. Heat and choking fumes swept round her. Earth and stones came down in a deluge, most of it prevented from falling on her by the solid mass of the tower. Then the world was silent again, silent except for the drone of the plane.

SHEILA moved slowly, raised her face and looked cautiously about her. Where open field had been was a crater some twelve feet wide and perhaps eight feet deep. She got slowly to her feet, wiggling her fingers in her ears to clear them again. With weak knees she tottered forward, stopped at the edge of the working and stood well concealed, watching the airplane come swiftly to earth near the crater. It taxied for a moment, then the pilot reduced the engine to a tick.

"Marvin Brant!" Sheila whispered incredulously to herself, as the first figure climbed through the opened doorway. She would know the steel magnate anywhere. *She pressed herself into deeper concealment* as Secretary Elford followed. Van Rutter and Endicott she did not know: but in any case she had seen enough.

"Lovely! Lovely!" Brant's thick, ecstatic voice carried quite clearly in the still air. "From a bomb half an inch wide we got this! Just think what a ton bomb could do! Van Rutter, we can master the earth! We've got everything tied up in bows."

There was silence for a moment as the group studied the crater, then the plane's pilot came ambling forward. Brant swung on him suddenly.

"Say you, why the hell didn't you drop that shell right on the mine shaftings as I told you? According to Vanson, Bradfield's body is in that first shaft there. Why didn't you drop the bomb on it?"

"Sorry, Mr. Brant. I guess the thing was so darned tiny I had my aim all wrong."

"O.K., maybe we'll try again later," Brant grunted.

"We'd better get out of here," Van Rutter remarked abruptly. "Some of those people from the garden city will start blowing along if we don't. We can say we saw the explosion happen, of course, but I'd sooner keep in the clear. Let's go. Satisfied, Endicott?"

The scientist nodded. "Quite. I know now that these bombs will smash earth, rock, and metal. The rest is simplicity itself."

The men turned back to their plane. Sheila remained in her position, watching as the propeller started up again. Only when the plane had climbed far into the sky and disappeared toward New York City did she dare to move. Her eyes were narrowed bitterly.

"So it was Elford who stole that formula—for Brant! *All right; now we know what to do.*"

Springing from her concealment she hurried across the field to the road as fast as her still shaky legs would take her. Half an hour or so later she was in a taxi being whirled to the Science Association.

Dr. Carson listened in grim silence as she told her story. *If he needed any proof at all the girl's dirt-caked clothing and frantic eyes were sufficient.*

". . . so Dake's down the first shaft," she finished hoarsely. "Vanson is a wrestler or something: I've heard of him before. Dad, we've got to get Dake to the surface. By myself I dared not try."

"No, of course not." Carson compressed his lips. "So it is Brant at the bottom of all this, eh? It's one thing to know he is responsible, but decidedly another to prove it!"

"But—but I *saw* him and those others drop that bomb! At least we can have Vanson arrested."

Carson shook his head slowly, his face serious. "Brant is the most powerful man in this city. You can be assured that Vanson is under his protection. He'd get him freed instantly. We're dealing with a man who is utterly ruthless, Sheila. He can crush you, and me, the whole Association, without effort. No, we've got to think very carefully before we act. However . . ." Carson got to his feet briskly "I'll notify the authorities and let them worry over it. For our part we'll get over to the mine with equipment right away. While you get changed I'll gather the boys. Be ready in fifteen minutes."

IN *HIS* own office Marvin Brant was smiling complacently as he regarded Elford and Van Rutter.

"You know what to do Van Rutter?"

"Of course." The arms man thoughtfully regarded the photostatic print of the atomic force formula, then slipped it in his brief case. "I'll have every available factory in my European ring working at full pressure right away. After that it is simply a matter of loading the planes with bombs. Five hundred planes carrying no insignia are already waiting at the European underground base."

"Good!" Brant's eyes gleamed. "You, Elford, will work in conjuction with Endicott and see to it that bomb manufacture goes right ahead. We go into action in seven days . . ."

CHAPTER III

The Phantom Avenger

THE autumn dusk was closing down when Dr. Carson, Sheila, and the workmen arrived with their mobile van at the mine workings.

Carson remained silent as the girl pointed toward the crater in the dying light, then she turned eagerly

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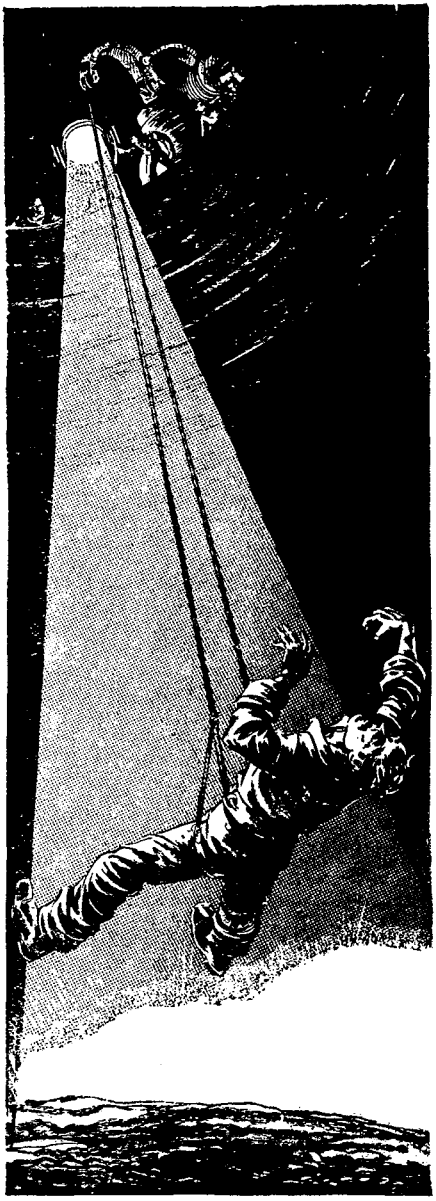

and flashed on her torch, pointed to the heavy footprints leading to the first mine working.

Carson stared into the black, windy depths and stroked his chin. Then he glanced around the landscape.

"Better lay off the searchlight for the moment, boys: we don't want to attract attention if we can help it. O.K., Hurst, let's get started."

The gang boss nodded, signaled to his boys. Between them they slung a thick rope out into space, fixed it quickly to a pulley, let the free end hang over the shaft. Followed a snapping of clips and a cradle was in position.

"I'll take it," said one of the men briefly, a broad shouldered giant in corduroy. He settled himself in the cradle, switched on his torch, then gave a nod. The winch on the truck started to unwind the rope slowly.

Leaning as near the edge of the shaft as they dared Carson and the girl watched anxiously as the torch light went bobbing into the emptiness below. It became remote, vanished at last as the man's body presumably hid it from sight.

"He's a long time," Carson said at last, uneasily—then the words were no sooner out of his mouth than from the shaft there came an unearthly, echoing scream— a scream of mortal anguish followed by heavy silence.

"Say—what in hell was that?" whispered the foreman huskily.

"Pull him up—pull him up!" Carson panted, recovering himself suddenly. "Quick, man!"

Instantly horny hands tugged on the rope winch handle. After twelve turns the dead weight in the cradle came sprawling like a sack of coals over the shaft edge. It was the laborer all right, gasping and choking heavily.

"What's the matter, man?" Carson shouted, seizing him. "What went wrong down there?"

The man breathed erratically, swallowed air in great gulps.

"Something—something horrible down there, Doc. Like—like bayonets going through my heart. I guess —I fainted—"

"Was Dake Bradfield there?" Carson demanded.

"No—the shaft's empty. . . ." The man stopped, made a twisting motion, then relaxed. In horrified silence the group glanced at one another. Then Hurst stepped forward and took the man's pulse.

"He's dead, chief," he said soberly, glancing up.

CARSON'S jaw set. "A man of his strength killed by something we do not understand, and no sign of Dake in the shaft. Listen, Sheila, either you were wrong in what you heard or—you are quite convinced you heard Brant say that Vanson had thrown Dake's body down this shaft. You are sure you *saw* Brant, Van Rutter, and the rest of them?"

The girl nodded wearily. "Of course! Let's have the searchlight down the shaft. We should have done

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it at first."

Carson nodded to the waiting Hurst. The dead man was gently lifted onto the truck, then the searchlight swung into action, poured its blazing beam down the shaft. Motionless, the party gazed to the bottom of the length. The light reflected slightly from soft mud.

"There are ruts all the way up the shaft," Hurst remarked at length. "A guy *could* climb up—"

"Don't talk rubbish!" Carson snapped. "Dake Bradfield was dead."

"But suppose he wasn't?" Sheila put in quickly. "That soft mud would save him from injury if he fell slackly."

Carson stood brooding. Hurst said, "Well, he ain't there anyway. What's next, chief?"

"I wonder what he means by bayonets through his heart?" Carson's keen eyes wandered to the position of the bomb crater in the darkness.

"You boys stay here," he said suddenly. "Kill that searchlight and wait for me. I'm going back to headquarters for some instruments. Whatever killed Mason must have a scientific explanation, and I think it just possible that bomb crater may have something to do with it. Come Sheila."

He turned swiftly towards the car parked next the truck.

VANSON, the Manhattan Strangler, put the finishing touches to his bow tie, patted his tuxedo in satisfaction, then turned from the dressing table mirror. Humming through his heavy, scarred lips he walked briskly into the comfortably furnished lay-out of the drawing room. This uptown apartment did not match his personality, but what of it? It was a good joint to bring a blonde to.

He turned to the wall-safe, twisted the combination wheel, took out a wad of currency.

"A thousand smackers for bumping a guy off with a piece of sash cord," he said slowly. "Brant sure pays well for service—and did he get good service!" He flexed his vast shoulders, stuffed the notes in his wallet, then glanced at his watch. In ten minutes he was due to pick up Daphne Gibson. Then—

He grinned in anticipation. Daphne wasn't too tough when a guy with money wanted to do a spot of necking. Supper uptown, then back here. . . .

Humming leisurely again, Vanson shut the safe and ambled over to his hat and coat, put them on with the air of the gentleman he fancied he resembled. He moved to the main door, then stopped at a sound behind him. Slowly he turned to look at the cause of it—and if Vanson had never known fright in his life before he certainly knew it now.

A motionless figure stood in the doorway leading to the bedroom—a figure in a torn, clay-caked suit, a figure with dark hair trailing down over his ashy, merciless face. There were eyes watching from that face, eyes that did not blink, eyes of piercing blue that took account of every move. The mouth was one straight line, unyielding and inflexible.

Slowly Vanson's horrified gaze traveled to the apparition's hands. They were level, and apart, holding a length of sash cord between them.

"Dake Bradfield!"

The words belted from Vanson's lips by the sheer force of the terror behind them. He stumbled backward for the door, fumbled with the knob, fished for the key. The door was locked, being the outer one, and somehow that key failed to work in his paralyzed fingers. All the time he kept his eyes fixed on that figure. He could feel sweat pouring down his face.

"Why did you kill me, Vanson?" the figure asked at last, in a cold, brittle voice—and at the same time he advanced with soundless tread, the cord dangling from his fingers.

"I—I didn't!" Vanson shouted hysterically. "Now listen, get this straight! Give me a break, can't you? I—"

"You killed me, Vanson, for a thousand dollars," Bradfield said, in the same dead level voice. "I heard you say so when you took your money from the safe. I came through your bedroom window. You killed me, Vanson, and now I'm going to kill you. Simple, is it not?"

"But—but you can't! You died! I—"

Vanson broke off and made a dash for it, but that was his undoing. The cord dropped suddenly round his bull neck and pulled taut. He twisted, lashed around with a ham of a fist, but another like the bumper of an automobile crashed into his jaw and sent him reeling.

He fought helplessly against relentless, overpowering strength. His muscles seemed like putty against the man he had killed. This strangling cord. . . . As he reeled into darkness he saw that gray, unsmiling face watching him.

Bradfield left the cord where it was round the Strangler's neck, went out silently the way he had entered.

IT was midnight before Dr. Carson finished his experiments with a battery of instruments at the mine working. His face was perplexed in the light of the moon.

"I don't understand it!" he declared worriedly. "The instruments show that some kind of powerful radiation is prevalent in the bottom of the shaft. But it doesn't fit into any classification I know of. I thought at first it might be the emanations of radium, that there might really be radium deposits down there. Now I realize I am wrong."

"Then Mason got the full force of this radiation?" Hurst asked quickly.

"Yes: none of which explains where Bradfield has vanished."

"What—what do we do now?" Sheila asked anxiously.

"What *can* we do?" Carson turned disconsolately to the car. "All I can do is turn these instruments over to the Association for examination and see if they

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can analyze anything. The police will have to try and solve the mystery of Bradfield. Come, my dear. It's no use standing moping here. Besides, we're in danger all the time we stop here. Brant and his men might come along—

"All right, boys, pack up and let's get home."

Sheila turned slowly away, too miserable to speak a word.

HENRICH VAN RUTTER stirred uneasily in bed, aware of a distant strident noise. By degrees wakefulness came to him: he switched on the light and squeezed his eyes at the telephone, lazily lifted the receiver.

"Well?" he yawned into the mouthpiece.

"Van Rutter? Say, something terrible's happened!" The urgent voice of Marvin Brant at the other end of the wire was sufficient to spurt the arms king into alertness. He stared at his watch—2:20 a.m. What the hell did the big fellow want at this hour. And as he thought, he listened.

". . . and Vanson has been killed, strangled with a piece of sash cord. It's serious, Van: somebody's onto our plans."

"Needless worry," Van Rutter growled. "Probably some pal of that ape's that had a grudge against him—"

"Then why was he strangled in the same manner as Dake Bradfield?" Brant demanded. "Suppose Bradfield didn't die after all? I only got the news a little while ago. A dame called Daphne Gibson rang up and asked me for help. She was found at Vanson's apartment and the police are holding her. I'll help her, of course. She wouldn't have the strength to strangle Vanson anyway."

"And what now?" Van Rutter asked, with ominous calm.

"We've got to hurry things up, Van. You were planning to start for Europe tomorrow, weren't you?"

"Correct. Everything to be ready in seven days."

"We've got to alter that," Brant said grimly. "You must leave for Europe within the hour, and we want action before seven days. How soon can you make it?"

"I can have a hundred bombs manufactured by sundown tomorrow if I get my factories on double shift. A hundred can do plenty of damage for a first warning. The rest can follow for the attack proper."

"O.K.!" Brant sounded relieved. "Hop to it, and let me know how you make out. I'll increase the shift on my own production too."

Van Rutter hopped out of bed, yelled hoarsely for his manservant. . . .

AT the other end of the wire, Brant sitting up in bed like a vast porpoise in a vividly striped pajama suit, dialed another number with frantic haste.

"Elford?" he snapped, as that calm voice answered him.

"Yes, Mr. Brant. Anything wrong?"

"Plenty! I have an uneasy feeling that Bradfield isn't dead after all. I've no time for details now; I'll tell you tomorrow. Where's Endicott?"

"Home. I'm supervising the shift."

"Get Endicott and tell him the shift's doubled. Press every available scientist into action. We want bombs in half the time we planned. Understand?"

"Right!" Elford rang off without further questions.

"Good man, Elford," Brant muttered, lying back on the pillow and meditating. "Knows how to keep his trap shut."

He switched the light off and composed himself for slumber again. But somehow he could not doze off; his mind was too active at this sudden upset in his plans. He opened his eyes again and lay looking at the long oblong of moonlight cast through the unshaded window.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes later when he saw the moonlight dim before a shadow—the outline of a man's head and shoulders. He lay rigid, listening, heard the window catch slide back gently. Through his eyelashes he watched a figure jump softly down into the moonlit area and stand watching him.

Stealthily, Brant's hand crept under his pillow and closed on the revolver that always lay there. Then in one movement he whipped the gun level and fired—the figure did not budge for a moment, then it came through the smoke of the discharge, switched on the bedside lamp, and stood glaring down with unholy calm.

"Bradfield!" the steel man gulped. "Then my guess was right!"

Bradfield said nothing, but his hand shot out abruptly and whipped the gun from Brant's hand, sent it spinning across the room. That done, he wrenched free the telephone wire from wall and phone and swung it gently between his hands. Brant lay watching with his eyes popping.

"At your orders," Bradfield said slowly, "Vanson strangled me with a piece of cord and threw me down a mine shaft. For something like fifteen hours I was dead! *Dead!* Then I came back to life. How, is my business. Of all the men that have ever died, Brant, one came back—and that one is me! I have many things to do, but vengeance comes first. I have killed Vanson; I shall kill you. Then Elford, then Van Rutter. One by one!"

"Wait!" Brant exclaimed, his jowls quivering. "I'll give you back the formula. It hasn't been used yet." He thought swiftly of Van Rutter's photostatic copies. "I'll—I'll give it back to you and a million dollars in cash. That's a fair bargain!"

"You consider that fair recompense for seeing beyond the grave?" Bradfield's voice contained an awful, chilling solemnity.

"Two million then—anything you want!" Brant was sweating visibly.

"Anything?"

"You have only to name it!" Brant cried, hope flooding his ashy visage.

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"Very well, I will. I want your life!" And with that Bradfield's hands suddenly shot out and whipped the telephone cord round the magnate's neck. It tightened with irresistible force.

"Now you know how I felt, as I died," Bradfield whispered. "It got tighter—and tighter, like this, until. . ." He left the cord knotted and watched the final threshings of the gross form amidst the bedclothes. That empurpled face with its starting eyes was not a pretty picture.

"At this moment it is a cleaner, sweeter world for being without such as you." Bradfield spoke to the dead man calmly, then he glanced up at a sudden hammering on the door.

"Mr. Brant, are you all right, sir? I heard a shot a few moments ago. Mr. Brant—"

Bradfield turned, glanced toward the buried bullet in the window frame whither Brant's lightning aim had sent it, then he moved to the window and slid out gently into the night.

"Van Rutter. . ." he mused as he dropped to the grounds.

THE newspapers next morning carried a conglomeration of news, most of it under the heading of—

MARVIN BRANT MURDERED

All over America people read of the magnate's death at the hands of an unknown slayer. The parallel case of Vanson was quoted, but not played up. Some people were sorry to hear the news—Brant's financial friends mainly—but everybody was disturbed by the hints contained in the general write-up.

". . . and according to our European representative's information, received only an hour ago, the death of Marvin Brant will have wide repercussions. It is not even improbable that International complications may develop between this country and Europe. Henrich Van Rutter, the eminent arms king, hinted at possible complications in an early interview this morning when he landed at Paris airport to attend to financial matters precipitated by Brant's death. It is thought. . ."

So it went on, until most Americans realized that the death of Marvin Brant was to mean far more than just that. His interests were so far reaching, so complex.

Sheila Carson, haggard from a restless night, burst into her father's office during the morning, waving the newspaper in her hand.

"You've read this, dad?" she asked breathlessly, and he nodded gravely.

"Long ago, over breakfast."

"It's Dake!" the girl cried, her eyes wide. "I—I can sort of feel it inside me. Brant and Vanson both died the same way as Dake, and since we couldn't find Dake it proves—"

"It might prove that the man who murdered Dake also murdered Vanson and Brant," Carson said quietly, then at the girl's troubled look he came round the desk and gently put an arm round her shoulders.

"You've got to think clearly, Sheila," he went on gravely. "Don't get hysterical notions because you want them to be true. I realize what you're thinking—but I've been thinking a bit longer than you. It cannot be Dake because he was killed and nobody can come back from death. Certainly this strangler has done us a good turn by killing Brant—but there's an even more dangerous enemy in Van Rutter. In that newspaper it says he went to Europe to settle up Brant's affairs. Brant, according to the police, was strangled at 2:40 this morning. Van Rutter, however, caught the 3:00 a.m. express air liner for Paris. He could not have known of Brant's death when he started off, as he'd have us believe. He must have got news over the radio as the plane flew and altered his story to match up with it in Europe.

"So why did he *really* go to Europe? An arms king does not go there at such frantic short notice without grim meaning behind it. We can assume he has the atomic force secret in his possession, that he went under the orders of Brant. All of which means trouble with a capital T. For one moment I dared to suspect that *he* had killed Brant until the time discrepancy showed he couldn't have done it in the time. The airport authorities cleared that up very quickly."

"Elford, perhaps?" Sheila mused: then she shook her head firmly. "No, dad, it was Dake! Call it intuition, but I'm convinced—"

She broke off and waited as the desk buzzer sounded.

"*Well?*" Carson said brusquely.

The girl's voice in the outer office was nearly a whisper. "There is a strange man out here who says he must see you, Dr. Carson. He has got sticking plasters on his face and dark glasses. Says the name is Mr. Brown."

"Brown?" Carson frowned. "Oh, send him away. I'm too busy right now to—"

"He says he can tell you about Marvin Brant."

"He can! That's different. Show him in. . ."

SHEILA and Carson stood watching curiously as the individual with the dark glass and long overcoat was admitted. He waited until the door closed, then swiftly locked it. Rapidly he pulled off his soft hat, glasses, and plasters, revealed his face in all its ashy whiteness.

"Dake!" Sheila screamed, springing up. "Oh, Dake, thank God you're safe! I—I—thought—"

"Quiet!" he commanded, as she flung her arms about him. "I don't want to give myself away. I'm just Mr. Brown."

"I don't care who you are—you're safe," Sheila whispered, then she looked up surprisedly as he pushed her gently away.

"Not now," he said shortly. "That can come later—"

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"So you were not killed after all?" Carson asked levelly.

"Well of course he wasn't!" Sheila exclaimed. "What more proof do you want than him standing here? Dake, you—you look ill. Did you hurt yourself getting out of that mine?"

He hesitated briefly, then said, "No, I guess not. That does not matter right now. My worry at the moment is that Van Rutter got away. I killed both Vanson and Marvin Brant last night, but when I went for Rutter he was missing. I've found since that he went to Europe. I might never find him there. Neither can I get at Elford, deep under the Brant building."

"Then you knew Brant was the one who tried to have you killed?" Carson said.

"I knew the facts from you and Sheila. When you were at the minehead I was close by, heard all you had to say."

"You let us go to all that trouble!" Sheila exclaimed, amazed. "That wasn't very—"

"I had no time to explain then," Dake broke in. "I set out to find Vanson and Brant. I may as well tell you I'm alarmed. From the morning papers I believe Van Rutter had some orders from Brant before I strangled him—and from the trend I'd say my stolen atomic force is going to plunge us into devastating war before many days have gone by. To find Van Rutter or Elford now and stop them is impossible. The only other course is to defeat this attempt at domination by scientific means. I only hope to Heaven I have the time."

"Time? For what?" Carson frowned.

Dake gave a start. "Nothing—just something I was thinking about. "He looked at the pair steadily. "I know you're puzzled by all this, but you're going to be even more puzzled when I tell you that I *was* strangled. I died. For fifteen hours I lay dead at the bottom of that shaft, and then—*I returned to life!* I cannot describe it. It was both horrible yet fascinating, like awakening from a long adventure in a strange land."

He stopped. Father and daughter were staring at him blankly.

"It—it isn't possible!" Sheila stammered, white-faced.

"It happened," he said gravely. "And while I was dead I saw and heard so many things. Learned so much. Some day you will know. . ." He stared in front of him: for a moment he was a man apart.

Then Carson said slowly, "Is it possible that that atomic bomb crater had anything to do with bringing you back to life?"

"Maybe." Dake listened attentively as the doctor went through the story of Mason's strange death and the ultimate recordings of the instruments.

"Is it possible," Dake mused, "that atomic force has other powers of which we never even dreamed? The power of life and death? While I was dead I gained knowledge, enough knowledge, to work out all the powers of atomic force, given time. Since you made instrument recordings the task won't be so hard. My return to life must have had something to do with that bomb. I'll find out . . . if I have the time."

"Dake, why do you keep saying that?" Sheila asked, stirred by an uneasy premonition.

He did not answer. Instead he said, "We must prepare, Doc. I want the full run of the laboratories to put certain ideas into effect. The staff will help us whilst maintaining secrecy. We face a very real danger from Van Rutter. Strange indeed if the dead defeat the living! For such it really amounts to."

He turned, donned glasses and sticking plaster again.

"I'm waiting, Doc. How soon do we get down to the lab?"

"Now," the scientist answered quietly, and glanced mystifiedly at the girl. He fancied he saw a faint horror in her eyes, a horror that her waxen smile could not entirely hide.

Death had changed Dake Bradfield in some subtle, unexplained way. He was unquestionably a man from Beyond. And marriage? The very idea of it seemed completely forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

Cataclysm

PARIS saw them first, against the wild autumnal sunset. Out of the silence of that fateful October evening came a low droning note, at first attracting no attention, then gradually establishing itself in the senses as a very definite thing—the roar of airplane engines. The frontier posts of France, always manned, became sudden hives of industry. Alarm gongs rang throughout the mighty entrenchments of the Maginot Line.

Fifty unknown airplanes heading toward Paris in V-formation from the direction of Russia! By radio the news flashed to Paris headquarters. Possibly undeclared war from somewhere! The reports became an expanding ball of frenzied warning reaching to all parts of the world.

Russia, the mighty, the mysterious, evolving unknown plans through numberless years, had decided to strike. The planes *must* be Russian. The planes of every other country were recognizable. Paris waited, warned in five minutes of the approaching horde. Not very many people were concerned. Possibly it was a trial flight by somebody or other; somehow frontier laws had been violated. As for a possible attack, nobody believed it. The French authorities went about the task of demanding inquiry from Russian headquarters.

Air-raid warnings sounded in Paris. Antiaircraft guns swung to the defensive. Searchlights penciled through the twilight. If it was a mistake it would be good training, anyway— But it was no mistake! In another fifteen minutes, flying at bombing height and

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with a velocity making them difficult to catch with the hastily manned guns, the planes arrived.

No air raid in military archives, no earthquake in history, could match the fifteen minutes that followed. Three shells dropped simultaneously and Paris lifted right out of the earth! Endless miles of brick, steel and concrete lifted in crumbling ruin to the skies, fell back in a thundering deluge of debris. High quarters, low quarters, business and suburban regions. The whole lot went up in blinding explosive fire under the impact of atomic force. Nor did it end there. A cataclysm followed as the English Channel raged over the ruptured land and pounded a new coastline where Angers and Dijon had formerly stood.

The horror, the incredible violence of those bombs, was something defeating imagination. Three bombs, no more, and half France ceased to exist. There were no survivors. The people were destroyed before they realized what had happened to them. And those of other countries who had felt the earthquake concussions only had a glimpse of planes returning toward Russia as genuine night began to fall.

The world waited, stunned. But the wait was not for long.

AT 10:00 p.m. a radio call on an unknown wavelength swamped the frantic yammerings of newscasters. A voice spoke with clear-cut decision. England heard it, and America, and in other countries interpreters went to work. Hardly anybody in the world did not hear that voice.

In the laboratories of the Science Association, Bradfield, Sheila, Dr. Carson, and the assembled scientists stood listening in grim silence.

"I address this communication to the respective Governmental heads of every country in the world. All of you have seen what happened to France. That country, as a country, has ceased to be. I have power such as no man has ever known before. I can destroy, ruthlessly: but I can also build. I have no intention of destroying anything further for the pure sake of it. France was used as an example. Here is my ultimatum—

"Each country individually will resign its existing form of government and surrender unconditionally to me. Who I am will be revealed in due course. You may rest assured that my rule will be one of progress. If my ultimatum is accepted, agents will make themselves known at a specified time. They will complete the legal negotiations. If the ultimatum is refused, remember France!

"You have until midnight on Wednesday, four days hence, to decide. Broadcast your decision: I shall hear it. A last warning—any attempt to find me will result not only in the destruction of the investigator, but in the annihilation of the country he represents. That is all. Think carefully."

The communication ceased. Dake reached forth his hand and switched off, then gazed on the morose assembly.

"Obviously Van Rutter," Carson said finally.

"And if that massacre he pulled in France is any guide he means it too," Sheila exclaimed. "He must be an idiot, though: he might know that no Government will accede to a demand like that. The world is armed to the teeth anyway. There'll be the most unholy war over it."

"Four days," Dake mused. "I just wonder if it's possible for me to do it in the time?"

"Do what?" Carson's voice was clipped with impatience. "Even if we manufactured similar atomic bombs we'd only create havoc just as bad. He's got us cornered, Dake."

The scientist paused as he saw Dake smiling, that cold infinitely superior smile.

"There are some things about atomic power which Van Rutter does not know," Dake said slowly. "And there are some things about science which I never knew—until I died. I thought when I had found how to release atomic force that I had discovered the mightiest of powers. But what I learned beyond death showed me that I had but unfastened the first of many doors, leading to deeper and more formidable forces, basic universe strata."

INVOLUNTARILY Sheila Carson gave a little shiver. There was something eery, overpowering, about the inhuman calm Dake radiated. There was something frightening in his constant reference to after-death experience.

"Just—just what are you getting at?" Carson questioned.

"I found spatial power . . ."

"Seem to have heard of that some somewhere." Carson thought for a moment. "Theoretically, of course."*

"You're right," Dake said, with a quiet nod. The first man to moot spatial power was Aristotle. "But Soddy slightly enlarged on the original theory."

Carson laughed shortly. "Some use that is. Aristotle's been dead for centuries—since around 400 B.C.!"

"Did you ever stop to think how much his mind could have progressed in the time that has passed since then to the present day?" Dake asked quietly. "I met Aristotle—out there. I met them all—the ancients and moderns who have died—Sir William Barrett, Henri Bergson, Archimedes, Nicolas Carnot, Copernicus. Their bodies died, some recently, some centuries ago, but their minds have lived on, progressing into the vast forever. While I was dead I met them, found that the theories of each one had reached fruition in positive fact. But to them there was no way back with their knowledge: it was knowledge for space and eternity alone. To me, for reasons yet to be unearthed, life was given back again—and with it much of the knowledge of the men I met."

* It was Soddy, in his "Matter and Energy," who said there might be another power of which we know nothing, from which electricity and other forces are merely offshoots.—Author.

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There was an awed silence. Dake smiled reflectively. "And I thought I was clever! To be clever, one must die."

Suddenly he seemed to lose his thoughtfulness and went on quickly, "Much of what Aristotle originally theorized you will not remember, but you will recall some modern scientists' elaboration of his theories. Some of them have said that one dominant radiation, or force, constitutes the entire universe. In its essence it is ether, but in its variable states—created by opposing and lesser forces streaming through its midst—it is altered slightly to form into matter, energy of tabulated sorts, life, and intelligence, all different expressions of the *basic* power, but none of them having that basic power's efficiency. No man can ever know what force *is* unless he understands what *ether* is, for ether is the father of force. In the beginning, there was only this streaming force. Opposing radiations created the planets and suns of the universe, begot that ultrasensitive radiation known as thought, which commingled with matter and gave it lie."

"You mean," said Carson slowly, "that space itself, the vast emptiness of the void, is really a monoforce, and that everything else is a warp in it?"

Dake nodded. "All scientists know of the theory: it was left to me to see it as a fulfilled practicality beyond death. It is the answer to power unlimited. It is the key to the universe, beside which atomic force is like a dry battery compared to a power house. What we call empty space actually possesses unbelievable power. And, even as certain radiations warped that space and coalesced to produce matter, so can other radiations destroy the coalescence and bring empty space back to its normal position.*

"Matter can be removed by using the counteractive wavelength that formed it in the first place. It was built up by wavelengths, and can be broken down by the same process."

"AND you think you can do this?" Carson asked unbelievingly.

"I know I can, because I have the knowledge of the dead. And when I have done it I shall first remove the Brant building and all its underground laboratories from the face of the universe. I shall make allowances for atmosphere and nothing more. Without fuss or disturbance the Brant Building will give place to clear air! Then I shall find Van Rutter."

"How?" Sheila looked puzzled.

"Atomic force gives off radiations which are detectable by a compass, even as ordinary radium gives itself away. It is certain that Van Rutter will have some measure of free atomic force in those concealed European laboratories of his. I'll find him."

"You are sure this idea has an advantage over atomic bombs?" Carson mused.

"Certainly. You saw what happened to France. Atomic bombs means ungovernable power—and I *mean* ungovernable. In making sure of two enemies we might destroy thousands of lives and create millions of dollars' worth of damage. Sheer force is our weapon. Besides, I have other uses for atomic force later—and other uses for even deeper principles of science."

"Sounds all right to me," Carson admitted at length, "even though I don't figure out how you're going to do it. What will you use for the power to generate these wavelength radiations of yours?"

"Atomic force!" Dake smiled. "A use for it which Van Rutter could never have found—nor any earthly scientist for that matter, unless he died and returned. From a tank of water I can generate enough power for my purposes, power which will pass through circuits and transformers until it has the wavelength which my mathematics will show as necessary to correct the particular matter-warp we are aiming at. The rest will be simple."

"But how long will it take?"

"It must take no longer than three days. It can be done with all of us working at full pressure. The instrument itself will be no larger than an ordinary searchlight. In the meantime, Doc, get in touch with the President and advise him to contact other countries and tell them to ignore the radio ultimatum, and to keep all news of such activities from the general public, so far as is possible. All we need, outside laboratory work, is a plane to be converted to transparency on all sides of its control room. I'll work out the formula for a transparent metal right away."

"Right," Carson said rather dazedly. "I'll—I'll see to it."

ACTING under the advice of the scientists, American Congress deliberately treated the ultimatum of the Unknown—for such Van Rutter was to all save the Association—with contempt. The same line was adopted by every other country, but behind the scenes every nation carefully marshaled its armaments pust in case. Even had the scientists not advised ignoring the warning, there would have been no concession to the Unknown anyway. The world was too well supplied with military equipment to give way before threats.

What Van Rutter and Elford thought of the defiance was not known, and certainly nobody was much concerned anyway. Clever propaganda had convinced the masses of every nation that the French affair had been a natural disaster, on which a European power—it did not say which—had cashed in in an audacious effort to get world control. Every nation disowned the unknown planes, Russia included. The whole thing was a trick. It was marvelous how the propaganda experts sweated blood to clear the air.

But in the laboratories of the American Science Association Dake Bradfield worked with unceasing effort, had the entire staff working day and night in

*Einstein himself has said that matter is a pucker or rumple in otherwise clear space.—Author.

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shifts to help him. He seemed tireless, heedless of sleep, his mind always superhumanly keen, and his manner still retaining that hint of mystery that had been present with him ever since his return. To Sheila he was a complete paradox. That passionate love he had had for her before seemed to have vanished: instead she had become absorbed in the small army of workers he relentlessly directed.

Nobody had the remotest understanding of the scientific principles involved in the work they performed. They only knew that, in order, they created a metal as transparent as glass and tougher than tungsten, which was promptly molded to shape and replaced the ordinary metal body of a roomy, high-powered plane; that they rebuilt a radio transmitter-receiver to embody atomic force, which was put in the plane's control room; that the plane's engines were converted to use the power of tanks of water.

Then lastly they went to work on a device like a searchlight, fitted on universal bearings, its internal workings small but compact, utterly complex except to Dake's agile brain, containing all the necessary self-contained power to produce atomic force which afterwards passed through the mesh of apparatus for transforming it to the particular wavelength Dake would require. The thing was a miracle of engineering and scientific genius.

ON the evening of the third day the projector was finished, was mounted inside the airplane's transparent control room. The idea of the transparence immediately became evident to the others. By this means the projector could swing freely in any direction and pass its powers through the glasslike metal without disrupting it in the process.

But Dake was not satisfied even then. In between times he had been engaged on remodeling an ordinary compass. Now it stood among the equipment—an almost airless glass globe in the center of which was a needle, the whole being sunk in a mercury bath to ensure a perpendicular position no matter how the plane rolled. Evidently it suited Dake for he smiled grimly as he nodded to it.

"The first atomic force detector in the world," he murmured.

"You mean it will even detect atomic force from the air?" asked Carson in surprise.

"Its range is thirty thousand feet in any direction, and we shan't get that high up. It'll find Van Rutter as sure as if he signaled his presence."

Dake turned away, looked round on Sheila, Carson, and Jerry the pilot, seated at the control board.

"Guess we're all set," Dake said briefly, giving the door a final twist on the screws. "Sure you know how to handle this atomic power properly, Jerry?"

"A cinch," the burly aeronaut retorted. "With this new streamlining outside we'll do seven hundred an hour with ease."

"O. K., let's get started. First, the Brant Building!"

CHAPTER V

Universal Energy

WITHIN a few minutes the plane was sweeping over the vast, evening lit mass of the metropolis. The city lay below in all its compact huddle of mighty edifices, most of them already streaming with lights and night sky-signs. The sunset reflected pale pink in the waters round Manhattan Island.

Gaining altitude at length the machine turned eastward, made a beeline for the rearing mammoth of steel and masonry that was the Brant Building.

"Notice!" Dake said suddenly, as they came nearer, and he jerked his head toward the compass. The needle had steadied and was pointing directly at the building.

"We know that there must be some play of atomic forces going on in those buried laboratories there," Dake resumed. "Even if we did not know you see how infallibly the compass reveals it. The moment that needle is dead vertical we know that atomic force lies right below us. That's going to be useful for Van Rutter. First, though, we have this to attend to."

He turned and gripped the handles of his queer projector, swung it round until the sights were on the massive edifice with its multitude of lighted windows. It swept nearer—then Sheila gave a sudden exclamation as she stared through the transparent floor beneath her feet.

"Dake, what exactly are you going to do?"

"Reduce that building to primal space, blast a hole a mile deep under its foundations. There will be a free emptiness and air, with the buildings on either side untouched. I can measure this power to a hair's breadth—"

"But Dake . . ." The girl turned and seized his arm. "Dake, do you realize there are thousands of employees in that building? You can't destroy them too! They're innocent—"

Dake's face set implacably. "If I don't destroy them and the building I don't destroy Elford and the laboratories. I leave a source of deadly munitions untouched. In the end thousands, even millions, will die instead of the few hundred in that edifice. Out of the way, Sheila, please!"

She looked her horror even though she obeyed. The streak of ruthlessness in Dake's nature secretly appalled her. She looked below her again, for a moment caught something of the tenseness of the situation as the giant building became the sole focal point through the floor. The street in front of it yawned like a light dotted chasm. Sheila clutched her father to steady herself.

"Now!" breathed Dake suddenly.

He closed the power switches. The effect of projector's strange vibration was not immediately evident.

From top to bottom the Brant Building became

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insubstantial, like the illusion of a dream world. It hung transparent, incredible, for a moment with the figures of people momentarily visible through the suddenly glassified walls—then with staggering abruptness the whole 1,000-foot mass snapped into black extinction! Its very foundations changed to cavernous darkness. Where there had been the Brant Building there was nothing but an abysmal crater, sheerly cut. A yawning emptiness divided the two buildings on each side, both of them quite untouched.

"Stupendous!" whispered Carson. "No disturbance. Not a sound."

"Instant straightening of space warp, not a resolution of matter into energy," Dake said quietly. "That is why there is no noise."

"And thousands, or at least hundreds of lives wiped out," Sheila muttered. "People who had their lives to live, who had other people depending on them."

But her secret hope that Dake would show compassion was not realized. Instead he said gravely, "Hundreds against millions," and patted the projector lovingly. Then he glanced at Jerry.

"Head toward Russia!"

Sheila stood looking back at that yawning hole amidst the other buildings. Deep, unplumbed thoughts stirred through her mind.

IT was midnight, after a seeming eternity of flying, before the compass reacted over a vast, deserted stretch of land on the western frontiers of Russia. In silence the party stared down on bleak, unlighted darkness stretching as far as their view would encompass.

"Down there," Dake said slowly, "is Van Rutter's hidden retreat, obviously underground. Planes and atomic force which he thought he could conceal, eh?"

He smiled twistedly, watched the compass needle tensely as it swung slowly to the vertical. Gently he turned the projector's nose downward. Then he slammed home the switches.

It was impossible to see what happened, but moments later the blaze of searchlights revealed a landscape riven like the Grand Canyon, the sides of the chasm sheer and smooth. From the remote depths came steamy bubblings of inner discharge. Whatever had lain there, whatever vast enterprise Van Rutter had controlled, had gone forever. Without a sound or light, extinction had caught up with him.

Dake laughed slightly, a hard bitter laugh that made the others in the control room glance at one another.

"Never before did I realize how sweet a thing vengeance can be," Dake muttered, serious again. "They showed me no mercy, and I in return showed them none."

"Well, the threat of war is destroyed anyway," Carson said thankfully. "What comes next?"

Dake glanced at him. "I shall make war instead."

"What!"

"Not exactly in the way you think. You'll see what I am aiming at before long. First, I have a radio broadcast to transmit to the world, hence our high-powered instrument."

Dake switched on atomic force-driven transmitter and waited a moment as the power surged through it.

"Enough power to swamp every other broadcast in existence," he commented in satisfaction. "Just as Van Rutter did. And since for all practical purposes I am going to broadcast from the approximate spot he used I shall *be* him, with a change of plan."

Carson and Sheila said nothing, but like Jerry at the controls they frowned in some mystification as Dake pulled the microphone to him and spoke in a passable imitation of Van Rutter's voice.

"Governments of the world! Your ultimatum would have expired at midnight tomorrow night. But due to your continued silence I have decided on certain amendments, and I have given yet another proof of my powers by destroying the Brant Building in New York more completely than anything was ever destroyed before. Again I say I do not want actual bloodshed. But I shall cripple your power to attack me! Your secret armament factories, your hidden zones of destruction, will avail you nothing. Your one alternative to save yourselves from me is to destroy your weapons of war voluntarily and relinquish control to me. I shall expect a radio response within thirty minutes. If you refuse, then prepare for the *worse! If you accept, I will advise you further. That* is all."

DAKE switched off, stood reflecting.

"Just what is the idea?" Carson demanded. "Seems to me you might as well have let Van Rutter get on with the job! You're just as bad!"

"You do me an injustice," Dake said quietly. "Van Rutter intended to launch ruthless massacre against the peoples of the world in the hope of frightening the rest of them into submission, over which, with the help of atomic power, he could have become self-appointed king. I have no such ideas."

"Then why imitate Van Rutter?"

"Because the blame for what is going to happen may as well be laid at the door of the man whom people call the Unknown, otherwise Van Rutter. He had already made himself the target, so people may as well go on thinking they're shooting at him." Dake stopped and then asked a surprising question. "In the old days, what did one do to get a fox out of his lair when all else failed?"

"Smoke him out, I guess," said Sheila. "So what?"

"Humanity collectively is the fox this time, which I am smoking out. How else can one find out where *different nations' armament centers are without actual* recourse to threat of war? Think of the countless secret hiding places which only possible war can reveal. The expectation of attack will make every nation tear down its camouflage. But for the advent of Van Rutter humanity would have thrown itself at each other in time in any case, from sheer necessity

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of economic pressure and the need to *use* the vast weight of arms before they became white elephants. The arms would *have* to be used in order to get the money from another country—if beaten in war—to pay for them. One vast, vicious circle strangling progress which only a strong man with infinite power can break down. I am that man!"

"Go on." Carson was listening attentively.

"Well, don't you see that Van Rutter changed the situation? Instead of nations preparing to hurl themselves at each other they would have banded together against him. And, had he lived, he would have triumphed because of superior power. But if we still let the world believe he is in action we can draw them into the open, let them waste their activities on us—for they can't possibly harm us—and at the same time we will destroy their arms without actually injuring anybody, beyond those few we cannot avoid. In other words we'll draw the fangs and roots of war right out of the planet!"

"Destroy armaments for ever, tear down the barriers to reason and progress," Sheila whispered. "Oh, Dake dearest, that's wonderful— But just why do you keep up the pretense of Van Rutter? Why not reveal that—"

"Do you think any nation would feel kindly toward a power bent on destroying its arms, even if it knew it *was* the Science Association? No, Sheila—definitely no! We don't intend any harm, but we cannot make anybody believe that. It is better that fury be directed at a now extinct Van Rutter while the Science Association remains unsuspected. Of course, my ultimatum will be refused. I only gave it at all to keep up the illusion. Strange, but Van Rutter did far more for the peace of the future world than he ever intended."

"And afterward?" Carson glanced up morosely. "More arms, more build up, more conflict. It will take even more than you to destroy warlike notions in the minds of men, Dake."

Dake smiled, that same superior smile that seemed to make him like a god. "I have the knowledge of the dead, Doc, and with that so many, many things are possible." He pondered. "It all depends on whether I have the time," he ended slowly.

That oft repeated ambiguity was not questioned this time. Dake stood looking at the radio receiver, waiting. And his judgment was correct. Before the thirty minutes had expired the first answer came through.

Refusal! America would fight to the death! So would Great Britain, all Europe, the East . . .

Dake smiled. "O.K., Jerry. Home!"

ONCE more in the safety of the Association's laboratories, there was not a little grim amusement among the inmates, all of them in the know, as they watched the preparations of the world for battle with a still unknown and merciless attacker. The rumble of defensive movements spread across the earth in all directions. America too, mobilized all her forces. All unaware of the trick, the President called on the Science Association for assistance in this time of grave crisis. Carson gravely promised to do all he could.

Dake waited for a week, surveying through television and news reports the revelation of different nations' armament centers and fortresses. For his own part, in between times, he had a new plant installed in the plane which, using atomic force as usual, surrounded the flyer with an impentrable shell of energy. The plane was black, resembling those of the Van Rutter fleet. The glass center, though transparent from within was opaque from outside.

Beyond loading the plane up with ample provisions there was nothing more to be done. Dake gave the world four days to bring its toys into view, then as before, with Sheila, Carson, and Jerry he entered the plane at ten in the morning of October 29, 1980.

When Jerry had forced the plane to a considerable height Dake stood looking down on New York far below, surveying the centers of defense that had been contrived for the safety of the civilian population. He smiled, lowered the projector downward, sighted it on an antiaircraft unit near Times Square. He closed the switches.

That action was the spark that lighted the whole powder magazine. The swift, resistless changing of the Times Square unit into a bottomless pit started the American air fleet on the warpath. From north, south, east, and west they came in their droning, vengeful hundreds to do battle with this audacious individual who fancied he could rule the world.

Dake took no notice of them! He did not attack them. They either smashed their planes in pieces against the defensive energy shell or else, baffled by the mysterious powers of their adversary, turned tail with a view to conference with the higher-ups before going any further.

And Dake went on with his task calmly and steadily, flying at three thousand feet, tearing every armament and defensive dump out of the earth as he came over it, destroying people too where the margin was too fine for his selective instruments to avoid them.

In between the attacks he radioed warnings to the battle fleet gathered round the coast of the Americas. Either evacuate the ships within an hour, or be destroyed with them! Commanders hesitated, glanced up at that black speck in the blue, and wondered. They knew already they were tackling an invincible foe, yet one with a curious streak of mercy. They decided to evacuate.

Sure enough, within the hour the black speck returned. One by one, completely and mysteriously, thousands of millions of dollars' worth of steel and defensive equipment vanished from the water. The men in the little bobbing boats watched in dazed amazement, clung tightly to their seats as tumbling water came surging toward them. But they were unhurt.

THROUGHOUT the day Dake went on steadily, flying back and forth with stupendous speed across

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the continent, constantly shattering everything of a warlike nature he came across. Time and again fleets of bombers harried him futilely. Their bombs bounced away harmlessly: some of the planes were sent crashing to earth or disappeared in mid air. This soundless primal power, the sudden straightening out of etheric folds, was something no man could tackle.

It was evening by the time they left American shores—left it a continent without a weapon, a continent filled with baffled millions who could not believe that the Unknown was content to leave them thus, disarmed but unhurt.

SO DAKE went on, on the most incredible conquest in history.

For a week the airplane never touched ground, darting back and forth across the earth, untouched by man's most demoniacal powers. And one by one, in every country, weapons and arms centers and potential battlefields and fleets were transformed into emptiness. Ships sank, planes disappeared. Not a country escaped Dake's ruthless toothcombing. In one week he swept the earth clean of every destructive device man had ever owned or known.

Only then, content that he had not destroyed a single life willingly, did he return unseen to New York under the shadow of night, went back to the Association laboratory. His first act was to get the radio-transmitters to work, cutting out the flow of world news—a world still dazed with wonder and still desperately afraid.

"Peoples of the world!" Dake said quietly into the microphone. "Get your interpreters to work so all may understand me. People, you have been tricked, for your own good! I forced you into the open with your popguns and pistols in order that I could destroy them. Realize one thing—The man who *would* have dominated you and performed inhuman massacre for his own ends, is dead. I killed him with an infinitely great power. Who I am does not matter: I have already proved to you I do not wish to harm anybody.

"But I *do* intend to bring to this world a peace it has lacked since the world began! I can do it because I know things no man ever knew before. You cannot stop me, not even the most warlike of you. *Nobody* can stop me! But I give you warning here—I am going to give certain orders to the ruling heads of each country, and those orders must be followed to the absolute letter. If they are not, I shall know of it and I shall destroy without hesitation. I will only be merciful if you obey. But your obedience is not because I intend to dominate you but because it is to your eventual advantage that you *should* obey. This is not an ultimatum: a man with infinite power makes no ultimatums. Now listen attentively.

"Marshal together your finest engineers and scientists: you will have two days in which to do this. At the end of that time your engineers will take down the instructions I shall give. In each country of importance there will be installed a vast atomic power generating station. It is a power which can advance civilization two hundred years and more. One man tried to abuse it: none other will ever do that again! You have your orders for now. Obey them or take the consequences—and if any man dares to try and create a warlike weapon in the interval I shall know of it and destroy him!"

BECAUSE nations could do nothing else, and also because most of the responsible heads believed in the Unknown's honest intentions—Dake's orders were followed to the letter. There was surprise, even bewilderment, but the thing was done.

The moment it was, Dake, watching every move with anxious diligence, started a fresh radio broadcast, this time with complicated instructions comprehensible only to the engineers, and not always to them. But at least they knew what to do even if they did not entirely know why they did it. They were like men mastering the uses of electricity without knowing what electricity is.

The broadcasts followed at regular intervals when, through television, Dake was assured the work had progressed as far as he had ordered. Simultaneously, through the weeks, there grew up in America, Great Britain, Europe, and the Orient, enormous structures of specially cast metal, with adjacent power houses fixed in uniform formation nearby, from which left power feeds to the different nerve centers of various nearby cities.

The power houses themselves made their very builders gasp in stunned admiration. They could not even guess at the uncanny genius of the being who had devised all this from abstract thinking. But it was perfectly clear to them that here in these mighty power plants, from the mere breakdown of water into its atomic energy, was unlimited power for the development of commerce, railways, air-service, and all the amenities of civilized life.

But what would the price be? It was inconceivable that a man should give the world such power without demanding a heavy reward. World dictatorship, perhaps?

When Dake heard of this he only smiled. But his smile was not enough for Dr. Carson and Sheila. They wanted to know why, particularly Sheila. But when she came to look for him in the Association laboratories one morning he had disappeared, and nobody seemed to know what had become of him. Nor did Dr. Carson seem to deem it wise to investigate too thoroughly in case it happened to be against Dake's wishes. He would probably return when he was ready.

To Sheila it was an impossible situation. There were still many things she did not understand—or her father either for that matter. But all her searching drew blank—then ten days after Dake had vanished she got a phone call from him.

Would she come to the address he gave, and promise to tell nobody until afterward? She gave her immediate assent, puzzling over the place he named: it

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mentioned a little spot some five miles from Monterey in California. He would meet her, disguised, at the San Francisco airport.

He did, disguised in dark glasses and sticking plaster as on that first occasion. From the airport he drove in a closed sedan along the Pacific coastline road, passed through Monterey itself, finally stopped at a small, isolated little house on a steep shelf of land sweeping down to the open, sunlit sea.

ONLY when he had garaged the car and was in the house did he seem ready to talk.

"I had to send for you," he said, in a low voice.

"But Dake, why did you have to go like that?" the girl asked earnestly. "Do you not realize that you are a public figure? The greatest benefactor the world has ever known?"

"I know." He stared through the open French doors toward the sea. "That was one reason why I left when my work was done. If any credit is going about let your father have it, Sheila. I can never have it. I am legally dead."

"But you came back to life!" she insisted. "We can marry now, do all we planned, live in this wonderfully happy world of your creating—"

"No!" His voice was stonily firm. He looked steadily at her flushed, eager young face. "That can never be, my dear," he went on, with a vague semblance of his old tenderness. "God knows, I would that it could, but— I'm only a ghost, a ghost who must die again. Soon."

Sheila paled. "Dake, you don't mean—"

He fell silent, staring out to sea.

"I had the time while in the laboratories to examine the instruments Doc lowered down the mine shaft," he went on presently. "I know now what happened. When that atomic shell dropped to earth it released its energy. That energy mingled with slight radium deposits in pitchblende which were certainly around that spot. The combination of the two energies produced a form of mitogenesis.* Anyhow, enormously powerful waves of mitogenetic radiation were given off. They affected my dead heart like a charge of super-adrenalin. I recovered. My organs were in order: I had died only through insufficient oxygen. I had fallen slackly into mud and was unhurt. So I came back to life. To Mason those radiations brought death. His heart accelerated far beyond normal and he couldn't take it."

"So that was it." Sheila whispered.

Dake gave a bitter smile. "As I have suspected all along, there is a price. The life-return is not permanent! It is only a superficial thing that burns itself out. All along I have been desperately afraid I would not finish in time. I dare not love you again, my dear, knowing I must die!"

The girl did not speak. Her eyes were chained to him as he sat slumped in the chair by the window.

*The basic radiation which science generally accepts as the key of life.—Author.

"The fires of this spurious life are burning low. I have only a few hours left. I know it now. I came here intending to die without anybody ever knowing —but I had to see you again, explain the true facts. I chose this spot where I could gaze out over the beauty of a world I must leave, dragging out a few more hours of happiness given to me by an accident of nature."

HE GOT to his feet suddenly, put an arm around the girl's shoulders.

"Sheila, I found atomic force," he murmured. "It killed me: it gave me life back again: it gave me greater knowledge than man has ever known: it enabled me to give peace to my fellow beings: it showed me beyond death, and now. . . . It is over."

"It hasn't *got* to be!" she shouted frantically "Dake, you belong to me, to the world— It isn't right that this should be your reward."

He was silent, chin on chest.

"You must find a way!" she whispered, clasping his arm.

He still pondered, then said quietly, "Give me ten minutes, Sheila, to make a last experiment. It would be too harrowing for you to witness. I believe there *is* a last chance! Come in here."

He threw open an adjoining door and she passed into a small, sunlit study. She crossed to the armchair moodily and sank down into it, wondering what possible scheme Dake could have in mind. In desperate impatience she waited, tried the door once and found it locked. Not a sound reached her.

At the end of the ten minutes she tried the door again. To her surprise it opened instantly. Immediately her gaze went to the open French doors, the cool wind from the sea blowing back the curtains. Automatically her eyes were caught by a sheet of white notepaper held down with the paperweight. Mechanically she picked it up, read through a blur of tears.

"Dearest: There never was a way! Forgive my deception, but I had to make it as easy as possible for you. All my notes, except the formula for atomic force, which I have destroyed, together with a full account of events to date, are in my bureau in the study. Give them to Dr. Carson.

"I prefer it this way. It is better than waiting for the inevitable end. If my body is ever found it will not matter, because no man ever knew what happened to Dake Bradfield, except our own intimated friends.

"Remember me always, my dearest. Dake."

Mechanically Sheila blundered to the window, the wind fanning her hot, tear-scalded cheeks.

"Dake!" she screamed. "Dake—!"

The empty stretch of beach only gave back the echo of her voice. Words died in her throat. Her eyes were following a man's footprints going down from the windows, across the sand to where the Pacific rollers creamed and foamed in the sunshine.

There was nothing alive in sight, only the lonely, circling gulls.

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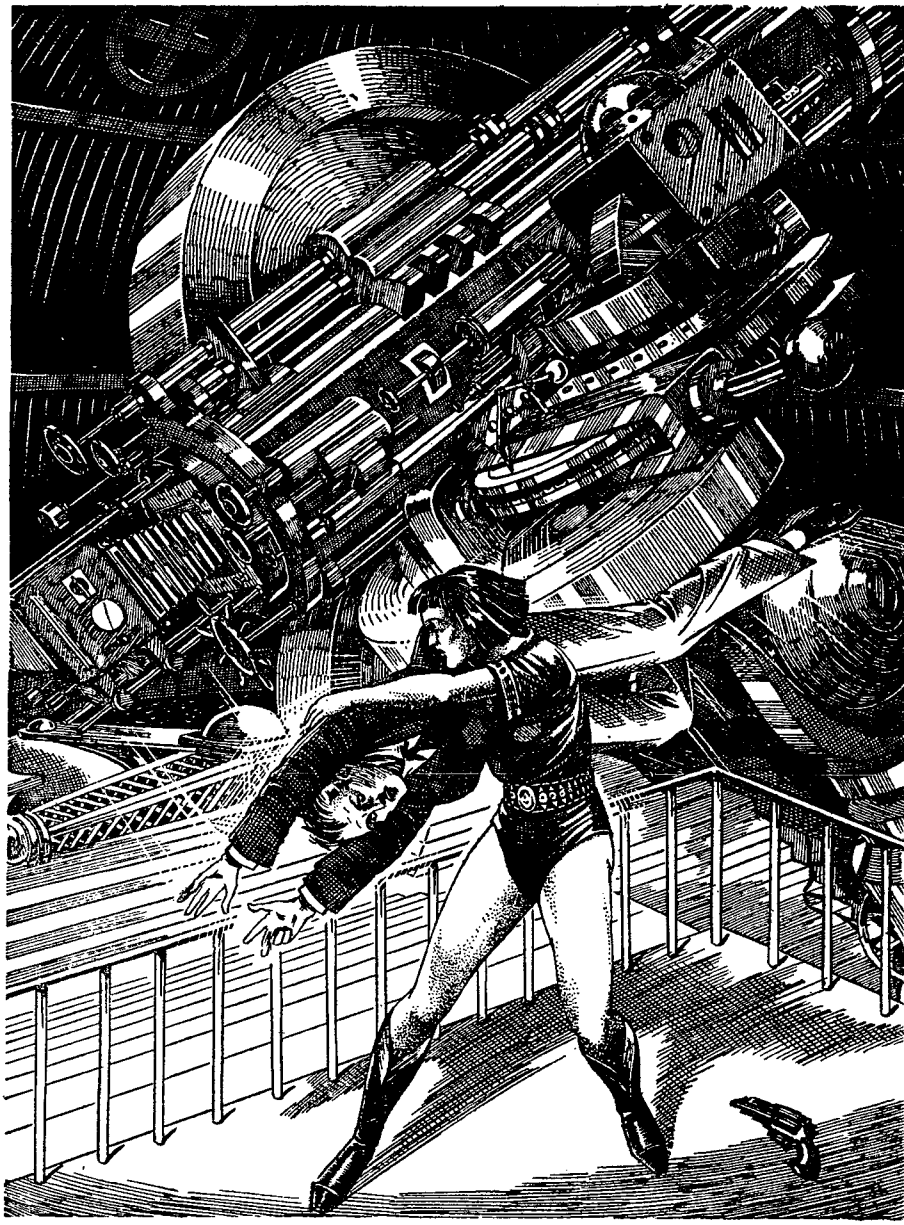

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THE GOLDEN AMAZON

By THORNTON AYRE

Violet Ray, mystery woman of space, comes to earth on an errand of destruction, and Chris Wilson follows into the void, seeking revenge

CHAPTER I

Mutiny—2040 A.D.

COMMANDER BEDSON stood in the control room of the Earth-Mars space liner with his technicians beside him.

"Red Tanner again, eh?" he asked the chief engineer grimly.

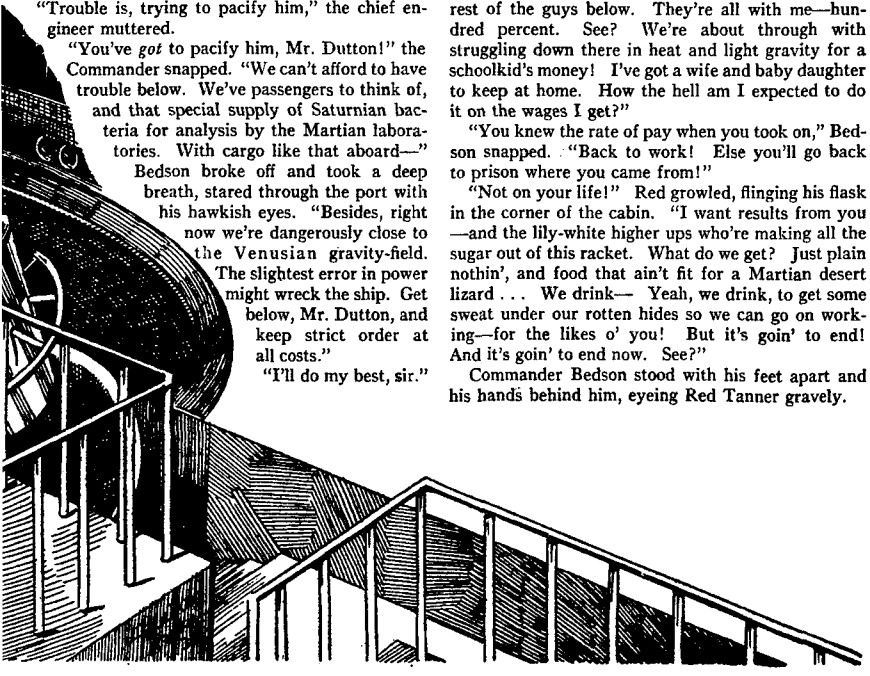
"Yessir. He's making trouble in the rocket rooms and he's got the men right with him. You know his line—better wages and conditions for the rocket men."

"Better wages!" Bedson exclaimed in exasperation. "My God, does the fool think I run the damned service? We all want better wages—but when a service is only at the beginning it can't pay much. We are just the pioneers, so we've got to put up with it . . ."

"Trouble is, trying to pacify him," the chief engineer muttered.

"You've *got* to pacify him, Mr. Dutton!" the Commander snapped. "We can't afford to have trouble below. We've passengers to think of, and that special supply of Saturnian bacteria for analysis by the Martian laboratories. With cargo like that aboard—" Bedson broke off and took a deep breath, stared through the port with his hawkish eyes. "Besides, right now we're dangerously close to the Venusian gravity-field. The slightest error in power might wreck the ship. Get below, Mr. Dutton, and keep strict order at all costs."

"I'll do my best, sir."



The engineer turned to the door, then he paused as it flew open under the force of a mighty kick. Red Tanner, the source of all the trouble, stood on the threshold, a flat metal flask clutched in his hand.

"Drinking again, eh?" Dutton breathed. "Now I get it! No wonder you're all burned up! Put that damned elephant-juice away, Red, and get back to work—"

"Aw, shut up!" Tanner broke in sourly. He levered his vast bulk into the control room and stood among the officers, swaying on his feet. In size he was colossal—a six-foot-six giant of a man, nearly naked, covered in the soot of rocket exhaust, sweating, damp hair trailing down his powerful, ugly face.

"Listen, you . . . !" He faced Commander Bedson and eyed him narrowly. "I want my rights, like the rest of the guys below. They're all with me—hundred percent. See? We're about through with struggling down there in heat and light gravity for a schoolkid's money! I've got a wife and baby daughter to keep at home. How the hell am I expected to do it on the wages I get?"

"You knew the rate of pay when you took on," Bedson snapped. "Back to work! Else you'll go back to prison where you came from!"

"Not on your life!" Red growled, flinging his flask in the corner of the cabin. "I want results from you—and the lily-white higher ups who're making all the sugar out of this racket. What do we get? Just plain nothin', and food that ain't fit for a Martian desert lizard . . . We drink— Yeah, we drink, to get some sweat under our rotten hides so we can go on working—for the likes o' you! But it's goin' to end! And it's goin' to end now. See?"

Commander Bedson stood with his feet apart and his hands behind him, eyeing Red Tanner gravely.

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'Red, either you get below or I'll have you clapped in irons. You've one more chance— Get moving!"

"All I want are results!" Red breathed, his gray eyes gleaming. "I want you to sign a statement saying the conditions are rotten for us; I want you to try and get us better pay—"

"I can't do it. That's for the Board to decide."

"You mean you *won't!*" Red bellowed suddenly. "You're too afraid of your own job, that's why! By God, give me one chance to get even with the higher-ups! One chance is all I ask— And I'm making a start right now!"

He swung to the doorway again. "O. K., boys!" he roared. "Come and get it!"

He twisted back again into the control room, slammed out his mighty fist with terrific power. It caught the Commander under the jaw and sent him flying into unconsciousness before he had the chance to realize what had happened.

In dazed horror Engineer Dutton suddenly knew what had occurred. The rest of the men must have followed Red up from the rocket-rooms, had waited the outcome of the meeting before striking. And now —? Down there in the nerve-center of the ship there was nobody in control, nobody to fire the blasts against Venus' decisive tuggings.

"Wait!" Dutton screamed. "Wait, you fools! It means death for the lot of us if—"

He went down with a blinding light before his eyes. Red stood over him, separated from the rest of the battle for a moment.

"Hell, but I wish you were that dirty rotten skunk of a brother of mine—" he whispered. "How I'd like to sock him like I socked you!"

He swung, fists clenched again, as an officer charged for him. Wild pandemonium descended on the control room— The noise of it spread through the entire mass of the great vessel.

IN the dining room the Venusian pull was evident. The ship was tilted sideways, hurling crockery, tables and people to one side with earthquake effectiveness. Mirrors splintered, women screamed, the pianist died at the grand piano as it slammed into his stomach.

Richard Ray jumped up shaking scalding soup from his trousers; then he clutched his frightened wife, Joyce, to safety in the nick of time as an electrolier came hurtling down in a thousand razor-edged shards.

"A wreck!" screamed a voice. "We're falling toward Venus!"

"Man the escape ships!"

"The baby!" Joyce cried in sudden horror. Then with her husband beside her she turned and blundered with mad desperation through a darkened confusion of people that was smeared with starlight, Venuslight, and spurts of flame as electric wires fused against wooden paneling.

Somehow the two staggered up the jammed staircase to their cabin, snatched up the precious bundle from its cot and raced outside again. They clung to each other, fighting through the panic-stricken mob, jostled, and scratched, until suddenly they stopped in a dazzling flood of blinding spotlight.

An officer was visible, ray pistol in hand, standing at the airlock of a safety vessel.

"Women and children first!" he bellowed. "The first man that tries to pass this doorway will be shot down. . . . Quickly, please!"

Joyce hesitated for a moment, then she found herself pushed forward by Dick. She caught a glimpse of his tragic eyes staring after her, then he was lost in the crowd. Helplessly, her precious bundle clutched to her breast, she plunged through the airlock into the dim interior.

The rest was a mad nightmare to her. Women upon women seemed to pile on top of her. In vain the pilot cried out that there was no room. . . . He had to have space to work the rocket-tubes—

With a terrific effort Joyce did the only thing possible with the baby, raised her arms over her head and held it free of the press that hemmed her in with ever tightening force. . . . She felt the ship jolt into space at last, lost all feeling in her numb, anguished arms. From the midst of a half-faint she could hear frantic shouts.

"I must have room to control! *I must have room!*"

"My God, we're falling— *Falling!*"

Joyce heard no more than that. Unbearable pressures beat round her heart and lungs. Darkness swamped in upon her in a vast roaring tide. . . .

CHAPTER II

Twenty Years After

CHRIS WILSON was rather proud of his position as Acting Superintendent of the New York Lunar Observatory. For five years now he had ruled over the staff of this unique building in the very heart of New York, admiring and admired by his staff. The main object of the place was to chart a titanic map of the moon from some seven million separate three-dimensional photographs, a task which demanded perpetual nightly accuracy at the controls of the monstrous photographic reflector in the building's summit.

More often than not Chris worked the reflector alone, sitting, a shock-haired, broad shouldered figure in the center of the controlling machinery, his fingers playing on an apparatus resembling a typewriter keyboard which controlled the mammoth so close to him.

In a way it was monotonous, but interesting. At least it was a life job, and that in the frantic, haste-mad world of 2060 was worth having. . . .

On this night of January 7 Chris sat as usual under the vast glassite dome of the building's lofty summit, hands idle in front of the keyboard, his dark eyes glancing ever and again from the monstrous telescope to the floodlit beacon towers of New York City. . . . The whole metropolis was spread out below him, a

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crazy jigsaw pattern of a million lights and shadows. To the scrambling hordes down there the moon was just a useful adjunct to a dark night: to him it was his life.

With a faint smile on his generously planned face he glanced toward the faint flush on the eastern horizon. Moonrise was due in half an hour. He sat back to wait, his controls all ready to begin the usual night's work. In those few moments of relaxation he thought of many things—

The busy workers in the rooms below the observatory, for instance, all engaged on this one lunar task; then he thought of the girl who had just left him after a surprise visit—Dorothy Rennat, the girl he hoped to shortly make his wife—a slim, rather timid blonde and the niece of Alva Rennat, the space-way magnate who had been directly responsible for financing this Lunar Observatory.

Chris smiled as he thought of them both. He knew exactly what they would be doing this evening after dinner—playing Martian Bridge in the girl's up-town apartment. Martian Bridge had a weird fascination all its own. . . . Chris had no time for such things. His life was bound up with maps, scientific interests, interviews with spacemen to check the details of Lunar points of interest. He took a vast interest in the spaceways, smiled as he thought of the antiquated mutineering ships of twenty years before.

He glanced up suddenly as the flush in the east deepened. At the same moment his eye caught sight of a glittering space machine, amazingly fast and amazingly small, hurtling dangerously near his glassite dome. For a second he held his breath in frozen expectation of a crash—then the little bug had scorched into the night with a roar of its tubes.

"Crazy fool. . . ." he muttered; but something was sticking in his mind. He had seen the name *Ultra* on that ship for a flashing instant. He frowned, remembered he had heard the name before in connection with a mysterious woman of the spaceways. Some called her a criminal, others a goddess—but all called her "The Golden Amazon. . . ."

"Wonder why?" he mused; then with a shrug he turned back to his control panel, poised his fingers ready to maneuver the reflector into place. A faint sound reached him as he waited, but necessity demanded all his attention on the telescope—at least upon the hair-lined sights that piloted the thing.

He sat rigid, eyes fixed on the guiders—yet through the time he sat there he was aware of further strange noises. A faint creak finally forced him to look up impatiently.

"Get out of that chair—immediately!" commanded a voice from behind.

UTTERLY astounded he stared at the emergency exit doorway to the roof. It was swinging wide now, its lock blasted away with soundless fire. On the threshold, silhouetted against the night outside, was a girl. Perhaps she was five feet eight tall, clad in brief shorts and sleeveless garment of some shimmering substance, while upon her feet were perfect fitting skin sandals.

Such a vision, against the stinging cold of the night, was next door to incredible. For several seconds Chris could not speak. He sat drinking in the girl's flawless form, the curious golden tinge of her satiny skin, the cobalt-blue of her short, waving hair. Her eyes, startlingly vivid against the gilded tint of her face, were deepest violet.

"Well, how much longer are you going to be?" she asked abruptly, waving the gun she held in her hand. "Come here! Quick!"

Chris got slowly to his feet, eyeing her steadily as he went forward. He caught a glimpse of a small space machine on the roof outside, the name *Ultra* on its prow.

"So you're the one they call the Golden Amazon?" he asked shortly.

She nodded her blue-black head slowly. "I believe they call me that, yes. My real name is Violet Ray, if you must know— But never mind that! Right now you're going to do as I say. Come here . . ."

Chris gave a faint smile—then with a sudden vast leap he hurled himself forward, his powerful hands closing round the girl's wrists. Grimly he forced her backwards— Then he got the shock of his life. Her gun dropped, yes, as he had intended; but she recovered herself instantly. Like an uncoiled spring she straightened up, tore herself out of his clutch and closed fingers of steel round his left elbow and right knee. Before he could realize what was happening he was flying through the air like a sack of coals, landed dazed and bewildered a few feet from the *Ultra*.

"Hell . . ." he breathed uncertainly, shaking his head violently. That had been no ju-jitsu trick; just plain superhuman strength. He glanced up to find the girl standing over him, her gun back in her hand.

"Better take it easy," she advised quietly. "Get in that ship—and I'm not fooling, either."

"Golden Amazon is right," he muttered, scrambling up; then before he could speak again a shove of a golden arm sent him spinning into the ship's control room. The girl followed him up, slammed the airlock and seated herself at the controls.

"Just what is this? A snatch?" Chris asked bluntly.

"Keep quiet and watch!" the girl retorted.

From sheer interest he did as bid. He stood gazing down on the shining glassite hemisphere of the observatory as the girl set the *Ultra* circling over it with consummate ease. Then she pulled out a switch, sat watching with her beautiful face set in determined lines as something dropped from a trap in the bottom of the ship and hurtled downward.

CHRIS gazed in stony horror, appalled as he saw the whole mass of the observatory below go mushrooming outward in the smother of an explosion. Clearly the object had been an atomic bomb of devastating power. By the time the dust had settled

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there was nothing left on top of the building, nothing but ashes and crumbled metal girders.

"You—you devil!" he gasped out abruptly, wheeling round with a livid face. "You destroyed the reflector, my work, everything that—"

"Nobody was hurt and the *arium* floor of the observatory would save the workers in the lower quarters from injury," Violet Ray replied, her blue eyes gleaming strangely. "I had to destroy that observatory tonight . . . And I just managed it," she finished, gazing out toward the rising moon.

"But—but why?" Chris yelled. "It was wanton destruction! By God, those people who call you a spacial criminal are dead right! There was no need for that—!"

"There was every need," the girl cut in; then with a contemptuous glance, "You don't need to worry. I don't want you. I only brought you along to save you getting hurt . . . I'll return you to the city center."

Chris hesitated on saying something as she turned back to the controls. His eyes went up and down her magnificent figure, the round smoothness of her supple bare arms and shoulders. There was a pliance and hidden strength in that form such as he had never known. He wondered how she endured the intense cold of a January night in such scanty attire.

"I've heard a lot about you," he said at last, trying to forget the incident of the observatory for the moment. "You're a criminal who works solo, aren't you? A mystery woman?"

"There are various accounts of me . . ." The girl dipped the ship toward the light spotted haze of the city center.

"The name of Violet Ray is of course assumed?"

"No. My father was Richard Ray and my mother Joyce Ray. They both died in a space wreck twenty years ago . . . Most people know that."

"I didn't."

The girl glanced up momentarily. "Well, you do now! Venusian Hotlanders found me alive when I was a baby. They took care of me. I grew up in the environment of Venus, and for reasons which I may one day explain, that environment did things to me. It made me utterly unlike any other woman—both in strength and intelligence. From ship's records I found my name entered in the passenger list as Violet . . . The original ship crashed on Venus, of course. I spent years in learning, helped by a super-keen intelligence. I modeled a space machine like the small safety ships that had dropped to Venus. To match my name I called my ship the *Ultra—*"

She broke off, adjusted the controls. "But I've no more time now. This is where we part."

As the ship finally settled Chris turned to the airlock and opened it. He could not make up his mind whether to love or hate this amazing girl with the contemptuous manner and the mysterious past. She decided the issue for him by bringing out her gun.

"Outside quickly. I don't want mechanics coming round. . . ."

Chris stepped outside to the floodlit expanse of metal landing park.

"Wherever you see the name *Ultra* you'll find me," she said softly, looking down at him with her fascinating eyes. "I'm glad to have met up with you—Chris Wilson . . ."

"Then you know my name—!"

Chris broke off. The airlock had closed adamantly. He stood in perplexed silence, watching as the little but incredibly fast ship hurtled to the upper heights in a flare of sparks. Then it was lost to sight in the dark.

For a long minute he stood pondering, the memory of the girl swamping his mind—then his thoughts drifted back to the commonplace and the thing she had done. His jaw hardened.

Alva Rennat must be notified immediately of course. He turned and set off for the main city traffic ways, boarded a tube express for the residential quarters.

ALVA RENNAT was playing Martian Bridge with Dorothy at the girl's apartment when Chris broke in.

"Mr. Rennat, we've work to do! The observatory's been blown up — and I've had a brush with that woman who's called the Golden Amazon, otherwise Violet Ray!"

"What!" Rennat shot to his feet, overturning the table in his excitement. He was a ponderous man, triple chinned, beady-eyed, and as bald as a stratosphere globe.

"Violet Ray!" Dorothy cried, twisting round in her chair so suddenly that her ash-blonde hair tumbled over her eager, sympathetically beautiful face. "Oh, Chris, what's she like? I've heard of her of course and— Is she beautiful?"

"Yeah," Chris acknowledged briefly; then he shook the girl's slim, restraining hand away. "I've no time for explanations now, Dot. What we've got to do, sir," he went on, glancing at the big man, "is to get down to Law headquarters and have this girl picked up! Her action was deliberate . . ."

"Confounded meddling busybody!" Rennat snorted, scrambling into his overcoat. "I'll settle her! Come on!"

At the door Chris hesitated a moment, seeing Dorothy's crestfallen look.

"Sorry," he smiled, patting her arm. "I guess you're interested in this dame as one woman to another, but— Tell you later. No hard feelings?"

She smiled, winked a blue eye mischievously. "No, of course not. Only I would like to know more of this girl. Being a bit of a hothouse plant myself, I—"

"Later," Chris promised, then he dashed out into the corridor in pursuit of Alva Rennat's bass boomings for an uptown express conveyance.

In the depths of the fast taxi Rennat simmered like a geyser.

"Blasted piracy!" he grated. "Damned scandal

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to the Twenty First Century! What are the space police for, anyway? Thousands of dollars gone up in smoke! *My* dollars! I financed the whole thing, remember!" He turned suddenly with beady eyes glittering. "And why the heck didn't you stop her? You're husky enough!"

"Not for her," Chris muttered, glancing out on the flying night lights. "She's like coiled wire—"

"She can't get away with it!" Rennat avowed firmly, and stared grimly ahead as they came to a street intersection.

Then something happened. Chris Wilson could never figure out exactly what. For instead of the street there was a sudden blinding sheet of blue flame and volumes of choking smoke. The taxi wheeled round wildly and fell on its side. The frames of unbreakable glass buckled and split.

Alva Rennat fell in the midst of the riven metal and landed head downward, a metal bar driven through his jugular vein . . . The world swam before Chris' blurred eyes. He could vaguely understand that he was being dragged clear of the tangled wreckage. There were shouts and the scream of police sirens.

"A bomb!"

"Somebody threw a bomb!"

"You all right, sir?" The blur went from Chris' vision and he found a police officer supporting him.

"Yeah, I think so, but—" Chris rubbed his head dazedly, glanced at the vision of the dead, blood-spattered Alva Rennat. He turned away, sickened.

"Back, please! Back!" commanded the police, forming a cordon.

Chris stood swaying on his feet, his brain clearing by degrees. Somebody had tried to stop them from reaching Law headquarters—and nearly gotten away with it too! More of Violet Ray's handiwork? Chris' brain cleared suddenly as a chain of thoughts assumed crystal clearness—Dorothy! They might try and get her too!"

He swung round and pushed his way through the eager knot of sightseers. After ten minutes of frantic running he gained the apartment building, jumped into the personal elevator and sent it whizzing up its suction tube. The instant he reached the girl's door and received no answer to his thunderous hammerings he began to sense the worst. It did not take him two minutes to unearth the janitor and have him open the door with duplicate keys.

In the main living room both of them paused, their eyes automatically directed to the mirror over the electric fire. It contained one word executed in purple chalk—"Ultra!"

CHAPTER III

Pursuit to Venus

"SAY, mister, what does that mean?" the janitor asked at last, pulling down his long underlip uncertainly.

"Plenty, I guess!" And Chris dived through into the neighboring bedroom, searched in every direction. There was no sign of Dorothy, nor of disorder—but it did strike him as significant that her outdoor clothes had vanished from the locker contrived for the purpose.

"Did you see Miss Rennat leave here during the last half hour?" Chris demanded, coming back to face the janitor.

"No, sir—can't say as I have. I—"

"O.K., skip it. I think I've got something." Chris was looking at the drawn-back catch of the window. He threw the sash open, twisted his head outside and stared at the fire-escape leading to the flat roof.

"Now I get it," he breathed, withdrawing his head and flipping the janitor a coin. "Thanks a lot. . . ."

He dived outside to the phone booth in the corridor. Frantically he dialed the number of Space Headquarters. The voice of Grant Chambers, his most useful friend, came over the wire.

"Oh, hallo, Grant. This is Chris. . . . Look, I want some dope urgently. That Golden Amazon dame's blown up the Lunar Observatory and then snatched my girl. She also got away with killing Alva Rennat, and nearly killed me. . . ."

"Holy Cats! What do you want me to do?"

"As I figure it she's made a dash into space. Tell me what space ships have left in the last half hour. Some must have passed through the General barrier atop the Heaviside Layer. Was there a ship called *Ultra* among them?"

"Hang on; I'll take a look at the record tapes."

Chris stood drumming his fingers on the kiosk panel. Then the voice resumed.

"A ship called *Ultra* beat the police barrier at Heaviside and skipped through at the hell of a lick! Police pursued it for five hundred miles, but were hopelessly outdistanced. Anyway, five hundred miles is beyond the law limit and under no planet's control. Ship was heading Venus way."

"Right!" Chris' dark eyes gleamed. "I'm going right after it! And you can do me a big favor, Grant. Tell the police at Heaviside that I'm following Golden Amazon and will go right through their barrier. I'll carry the Free Light to warn them as I approach. You can fix that?"

"Sure! And good hunting!"

Chris slammed off, dashed to the elevator tube, and so down to street level again. A fast airbus carried him without delay to the space grounds. His official card as Superintendent of the Lunar Observatory did the rest. In ten minutes the mechanics had conducted him to a Zemi-Fletcher Express. *

Chris slipped inside, sealed the airlock and sat before the familiar controls. One switch fired the *volcanite* fuel in the rockets; another, working in series,

* The Zemi-Fletcher is a one-man space machine capable of terrific speeds and supplied with two guns, one long and one short range, for personal protection.—Author.

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controled each tube independently or collectively at will. . . . With a spurting of underjets he forced the machine into the sky at a pace that made the mechanics below gape in amazement.

Despite his frantic hurry Chris had to slacken off. The crushing acceleration was like a steel hawser round his chest. His chair creaked on its oiled springs; he felt as though he weighed a ton. Little lights danced before his eyes— Then he was easier again, achieved the very maximum possible for physical endurance, sat staring out through the forward window with keen eyes, his jaw set, every scrap of his being concentrated on catching sight of the small bus owned by Violet Ray.

He was through the successive layers of the atmosphere to Heaviside before he hardly realized it. A button switched on the red Free Light on the front of his machine. With devastating speed he went through the ranks of the police guard . . . but the way was clear for him. Grant had done the trick. There was just the courtesy salute, then they were far behind.

And so out into the depths of space—into the confusing wilderness of starlight, moonlight, and sunlight blazing through the ebon eternity of space. Somehow, the void never lost its supernal attraction.

Like a statue Chris sat at his controls, rear tubes still forcing against Earth's gravity field. He stared over the endless vault, at the variety of shipping floating around—heavy freighters, liners, old space tubs from outer planet mines, leisurely hospital and first aid craft, all with their different mark of classification.

In thirty minutes he had left them all behind and was heading in an almost straight line for the blazing orb of silver close by the sun—Venus. He knew that his one hope lay in catching Violet Ray before she got to that planet. Once upon its grim surface, with its Hotland jungles, its mud rivers, its awesome mountains, and there was no telling how he could ever find her, or Dorothy either.

HE coaxed more speed from the machine and sat with his lungs bound up and perspiration pouring down his body. Time and again he went through this self-inflicted torture, relaxing only for brief periods. But space remained empty ahead of him; Violet Ray had had a good start. He used the robot pilot while he ate a meal and snatched a brief sleep—then he was back at his post.

Three times he ate and slept before he awoke to glimpse something in the black deeps ahead—a speck faintly visible to the naked eye against the blinding argent of Venus.

Instantly he turned to the telescopic sights and focused the thing. His heart gave a leap. Though he could not distinguish the name, there was no denying the shape of that bus; it was the *Ultra*.

He put on the power again and gave the ship all it had. By sheer will power and physical strength he hung on against the overwhelming urge to collapse under the strain. Supports governed the movement of his hands. His jaw lolled from its own weight. Blinding pressure hemmed in on his skull as he drove like a madman across the infinite. . . .

In twenty minutes he had made up hundreds of miles of leeway, drawn close enough to read the ship's name. From the flaring sparks it was pretty evident that Violet Ray had seen him and was suddenly determined to give him a run for his money. Her ship started to draw away with consummate ease. For one thing it was infinitely fast, and for another she was able, by very reason of her strange physical constitution, to stand up to the onslaught of acceleration. How Dorothy fared did not matter, evidently.

Chris let out a vast oath as he began to fall behind. He looked round him desperately, then his eye caught sight of the long-distance energy gun. With colossal effort, the veins bulging on his forehead under the strain, he moved the gun round, sighted it on the steadily receding vessel. Savagely he closed the spark switch and an invisible pencil of energy stabbed over the gap. . . . To his infinite delight one of the *Ultra's* rear rocket tubes crumbled into molten metal.

"Got you!" he yelled. "Chew that one over!"

As he had expected, the *Ultra* slowed down, its power halved. Within minutes his own terrific pace brought him alongside. Through the observation window he could see Violet Ray's grim, set face staring at him. He grinned at her across the void, snapped on the space radio.

"Guess you'd better stop before I blow all your tubes away!"

"Think so?" retorted the girl's laconic voice. "Play this over on your switchboard!"

Chris swung round with a start at a sudden terrific shattering impact from the wall of his ship. The plates flowed with fiendish heat, beat him back from them. Then just as suddenly the invisible energy shifted and he heard his rocket tubes go cracking to blazes one by one. His speed remained constant, since he was in free space, and the *Ultra* still kept level.

"Better put a space suit on!" Violet Ray's voice called. "I'm sending this one for luck!"

Chris watched in dazed horror as the airlock door began to turn red, then violet blue. In another moment it would be shattered— With a hoarse cry he scrambled into his space suit and spun on the helmet as the door crumbled into pure energy. The outward suction of air from the ship sent him spinning to the opening and out. He clutched the rended metal edge with his pincer gloves, saved himself, waved a fist over the infinite.

"Damn you!" he roared, and his chest microphone carried his words to the radio transmitter. "What kind of a hell-fired stunt do you call this? No tubes, no door— Give a guy a break, can't you?"

"Keep your shirt on," said the girl's voice. "I just chopped your ship up a bit to show you you can't bust tubes on the *Ultra* and get away with it. I'm not ma-

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rooning you; I rather admire your courage, as a matter of fact. I'm coming alongside; switches will open the outer lock. Come into the control room. . . ."

He waited until the vessel was level, saw the outer door-shield slide to one side. Rather puzzled he passed through the triple locks, closing each one behind him. Violet Ray, a faintly amused smile on her beautiful face, regarded him from the control board as he trooped in.

"Sorry to knock you around, Chris Wilson, but you asked for it," she said, as he took off his helmet. "And now you have caught up with me what exactly do you want?"

"YOU know darned well what I want!" Chris snapped, seizing the girl's firm bare arm. "I want Dorothy Rennat! What was the idea of the snatch?"

The girl shook his hand away. "I don't like being pawed," she smiled; then after a brief silence, "I don't see any reason why I should answer your questions. After all, on board this ship you take orders, not give them. If you've any doubts just try and start something!"

Chris breathed hard down his nose. He wished the girl would stop smiling at him with her perfect teeth, wished she was not altogether so desirable. It made his task doubly difficult.

"At least tell me if Dorothy is aboard?" he asked stiffly.

"She's aboard." Violet Ray turned back to her controls.

"Why did you take her? Why did you try and kill me? You finished off Alva Rennat, so why not me? I can't understand what you're driving at. . . . I only know I wish you didn't have to do such things."

"Why?" she questioned, staring straight in front of her.

"Well, because. . . . Oh, be hanged to talking! Fetch out Dorothy. I want her to know she's not left alone with a pirate, anyway. She gets scared easy."

"So I've noticed. But I'm not going to fetch her

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(continued from page 18

Grinning, Riley added, "And the world of Sirius will curse the name of Webb Saunders forever." A sudden look of fear wiped the grin from his face. "You don't suppose the gyroscopes can pull us out now. They're still running, but they're slowing."

Webb shook his head. "It will be days before they stop turning. "But their power is shut off and earth will slowly slip back where it belongs. . . ."

A sigh swelled his chest. "So far as we're concerned, those gyroscopes are just a symbol—a reminder that somewhere out in space a world is soon to die."

Riley shivered at the words. He looked down at Webb and Lynn. They didn't seem to notice him. He coughed. They still didn't notice him. He coughed again. Webb looked up. "What's worrying you now?"

"Nothing is worrying me," Riley answered gruffly. "I just happened to remember there was a reward of a million dollars offered to the man who found what was causing all these storms. I was wondering what you are going to do with all that money."

Webb looked at Lynn. "I think," he said, "I know a way to use part of it. I'm planning to invest heavily in diamonds. . . ."

Lynn blushed.

"Oh," said Riley softly. "Oh . . ." The aviator walked away. He knew when three made a crowd.

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yet; I can't move from this seat. You know what it's like when you're in a gravity field; and right now my particular worry is Venus. Sit down there where I can keep my eye on you."

Chris glanced at the interdoor leading to other sections of the ship, then at a commanding glance from the girl's vivid eyes he sat down by the control board and watched her operate the switches, working on one set of tubes only. . . . The ship dipped suddenly out of the dark of space into the upper levels of the dense Venusian atmosphere. It screamed through it, burst at last onto the wild, eye-wrenching grandeur of color that was the Hotlands, flanked in the far distance by a mountain range, to the right of which lay a river of swift flowing mud.

"It's a savage world, yet I love it," Violet Ray whispered, her voice unusually quiet. "I know it all, Chris Wilson—inch for inch! Its trees, its twenty-seven-hour day of saturating heat, its tidal mud flows, its honeycombed mountains . . ."

She stopped talking suddenly, eyed it all speculatively, drove steadily onward over the tree tops. Then at last the ship began to sink gently into a verdure-ridden clearing. The *Ultra* came to a jarless halt.

With a sigh the girl got to her feet, flexed her supple arms, stretched her legs.

"Give me freedom instead of being cramped up in this thing. . . ."

"Tell me something," Chris said, as she turned to the door. "Why have you come here to Venus and brought Dorothy with you?"

She eyed him levelly. "Sometimes, Chris Wilson, I think you deserve a medal as a human questionaire! Why I've come here is my own business. I'll send Dorothy in to you; I've a rocket tube to fix—thanks to you!"

Her eyes flashed at him as she went through the doorway. The massive portal closed after her. Chris got to his feet and fretted around moodily for some five minutes before the door reopened and a pale-faced, disheveled Dorothy came into the compartment, her blue eyes wide in expectancy.

"Chris!" she yelled thankfully, and flung herself into his extended arms. "Oh, Chris, thank Heaven you're safe! I saw your ship catching up to us and I thought— I thought perhaps this Ray woman would kill you."

"Where is she, by the way?" Chris glanced around quickly.

"She went out to mend a tube, or something—Chris, how did you know I'd been kidnaped?"

"Simple enough when that dame wrote 'Ultra' all over your drawing room mirror. I've bad news for you, Dot. Your uncle was killed by a bomb on the way to headquarters—and I only just escaped. I think Violet Ray was mixed up in it somewhere but I can't be certain. . . ."

"Uncle—dead!" The girl stared in front of her in bewilderment for a moment or two. Chris fancied he detected a slight hardening of her mouth; then finally she gave a helpless shrug. "Well, there it is—and here are we—Lord knows what for! This woman came down the fire escape, told me to dress in outdoor clothes and follow her. So—so I did. I wonder what—"

"Say, do you smell something?" Chris broke in sharply, sniffing.

Dorothy elevated her nose. "Why, I— Yes, it's gas!" she screamed. "Gas from this grating on the floor—" She pointed to her feet, at the vapors rising from between them. With a hoarse cry she stumbled toward the airlock, but her knees buckled beneath her and she sprawled her length on the floor.

Chris swung around, staggered toward her, but at that instant the choking fumes overpowered his lungs. He went down, gasping, blinded. . . .

CHAPTER IV

True Colors

CHRIS returned to his senses amidst the saturating but cloud-hidden glare of the Venusian sun. Heat beat around him in sickly waves, seemed to rise in a poisonous miasma from the lushy verdure on which he lay. He got up slowly, the effects of the gas clearing rapidly from his head. By his side, still under the influence, sprawled Dorothy. Gently he raised her, went to work with resuscitating movements and was rewarded at last as her eyelids fluttered open.

For a long minute she lay gazing round the clearing, turned at last in wonderment.

"We're—we're in the jungle!"

"How'd you guess?" Chris asked tartly, scrambling to his feet and dragging the girl to hers. "Sure we're in the jungle—but why? Why did Violet Ray leave us in this mess? Nowhere to go, no guide, no food, no weapons—"

"But the forest hasn't anything dangerous in it," Dorothy broke in, examining her curiously designed wrist watch rather anxiously.

Chris looked at her sharply. "How do you know that? When did you see Venus before?"

"Eh? Oh—I've seen it. Toured around the whole system once. . . ."

"Hmmm . . ." Chris grunted, but he still eyed her. "When you've finished messing around with that wrist watch maybe you'll help me think. . . ." He turned impatiently and stared at the gouged tracks where the *Ultra* had settled, then at the burned undergrowth that testified to the flame of its underjets upon departure. But why had Violet Ray done such a thing? He scratched his sweat-damp head in bewilderment.

"Wish I could figure that dame out," he growled, pondering. "She doesn't look like a murderess and criminal, and yet— Maybe her beauty puts a guy off his guard—"

"Oh, so you think she's beautiful?" Dorothy demanded, coming up to him. "You think she's even

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more interesting than I am?"

Chris didn't answer. The girl's outburst had rather astonished him.

"She's just a freak," Dorothy went on sulkily. "At least I'm a normal girl, and that's more than she is! She told me several things about herself on the trip, before we saw your ship catching up on us."

"What things?" Chris demanded keenly.

"Oh, scientific things about her physical powers. What was it, now? Oh, yes. She said that here on Venus cosmic rays are blocked by the succeeding layers of atmosphere, but solar radiations, due to the planet's nearness to the sun, get through. The outcome, in the case of a flesh and blood creature like her, is steady anabolism.* Instead of cells breaking down they build up to ever increasing toughness. Actual Venusians, reacting to a totally different set of radiations and not being flesh and blood, live and die naturally, as do Earth creatures on their own planet. . . ."

"So that's why she's so unique," Chris mused. "And her intelligence will match it! Records of old books, the remains inside the space ship that fell to Venus at the time of the mutiny—. She could pick up any language with her brains, and— You got plenty out of her, Dorothy!"

"She volunteered it—boasting of her strength."

"Well, it may explain her physique and upbringing but it does not explain her motives or show us what we're going to do now," Chris sighed. "Any suggestions?"

"Only one. . . . Why not try the mountain range? It's visible through the trees there— At least we might find water."

"O. K. We might even be able to get our bearings for Hotlands City, though I doubt it. . . ."

They turned together, forced their way through the livid verdure, stumbled through lichenous undergrowth, stopping ever and again to recover from the exhaustion begotten of the crushing heat. Venusian life, most of it small, darted and squirmed around and away from them as they moved.

In two hours they forced their way to the foothills and had the jungle behind them. Here the air was somewhat cooler.

FOR a while Chris stood silent, contemplating the rubble and stone leading to the mighty mountain range ahead of them. He looked at the tidal river of mud two miles to the left. The whole scene was wild, gave little hope of civilization. Hotlands City might be a thousand miles away for all he could distinguish to the contrary. He began to curse Violet Ray and all her works under his breath.

"Well, what do we do?" he demanded at last, swinging round to the girl.

She started to say something, then stopped as a voice behind them broke in.

"You'll walk! Both of you!"

Chris wheeled round, astounded. A man in white ducks had emerged from behind a spur of rock, gun in hand. He was dark, tanned nearly to black with Venusian radiation.

"What the hell—" Chris started to say, but the gun stopped him.

"Never mind the remarks, brother—just march! You too!" he added, glancing at the girl.

To Chris' inward surprise she was apparently quite unafraid: in fact he could have sworn a faint smile of bitter triumph was pulling the corners of her red mouth. She began to walk steadily toward the mountain escarpment with Chris alongside her. At a command from the man in the rear they both stopped at the solid face of cliff.

Chris stared in dumbfounded silence as that seemingly solid mass opened down one half of its length, evidently operated by some concealed turntable switch in control of the man with the gun.

"Keep moving!" he snapped, coming up again.

Without a word they passed down a flight of floodlit steps out into the rock and so into a roomy cavern filled with shadowless light. Chris' first impression was of twelve faces—hard, grim faces, belonging to men well past middle age. Most of the men were standing, but one was seated at a rough wood table—a giant of a man with the face of an old-time pugilist. Possibly he was fifty, possibly more.

"What the devil are you people doing here?" Chris snapped out at last, as the eyes regarded him steadily.

"You'll find out quick enough," said Dorothy briefly, then with an insolent smile at Chris' astounded expression she went over languidly to the table. In that short walk her manner seemed to change utterly. Her frightened air had gone; her features were grimly set.

"Dot, what's come over you? What—"

"Shut up, you, and listen!" snapped the man at the table, getting to his feet. He came forward, made a motion to the man with the gun in the rear. Chris felt his wrists suddenly pulled behind him and clamped together with steel manacles and link chain.

"WHAT'S the idea?" he asked bitterly. "Some gag of Violet Ray's I suppose?"

"Nope—I've no truck with that dame, young feller. I'm working on my own. . . . Tanner's the name—Red Tanner. Ever heard of it?"

Chris shook his head. The man grinned faintly; then with a sudden scowl he swung round on Dorothy.

"What brought you to Venus, anyway? And with this guy?"

"Violet Ray brought the pair of us," the girl responded. "We were stranded, and I didn't intend cooling my heels out there. . . . So I used the wrist

* Venus has an extra dense atmosphere probably made up of ionized layers, through which only the life-giving radiations of the sun can penetrate. Normally—on a world like Earth—rays of life *and* death penetrate to the surface. Scientists believe that solar radiations are necessary to increase of life. They also believe that cosmic rays are responsible for certain weaknesses in physique, and for death. They cause ketabolism, or breakdown of cells.—Ed.

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watch radio signal. I knew we were near this hide-out. . . . As I'd expected you sent Jerry out to find us. . . ."

Red Tanner clenched his fists. "You blasted little fool! You let the position of this hide-out be known with Violet Ray around somewhere maybe? It was a mad thing to do—"

"So you're the big shot of the crime ring that's been puzzling the Earth authorities?" Chris broke in savagely. "Guess I got you all wrong, Dot. . . . You're a two-faced little hypocrite."

"Take it easy!" Red Tanner growled "This girl's my daughter. . . ."

"Daughter!"

"Yeah! Surprised? Listen, I'll tell you a few things. Since you're going to vanish from sight later it won't matter. . . . I'm an ex-mutineer. See? Twenty years ago I landed on this blasted planet with a few of my buddies—here they are around me. We were stranded. I was a rocket-man in the early days —and why was I one? Because my brother, Alva Tanner, had me shipped off to jail on a false charge, and as was the custom in those days jail-birds could become rocket men if they had the nerve. I took that chance. I started a mutiny for better wages and pay— I lost. For twenty years I've been up and down the system, digging out a living. . . . I only wanted revenge on Alva.

"I heard about him, see? I heard he'd taken my daughter and given her a good education—I'll say that much for him He'd built a nice new observatory with money made through crooked deals. And I guess he was afraid of me coming back 'cos he switched his surname round to Rennat, which is 'Tanner' spelled backward. I spent a long time trying to figure out how to get my own back. . . ."

Red Tanner paused, slammed his fist on the table.

"I wanted a chance for power, see? I wanted to aim a blow at the peoples of Earth that would give me the chance to rule them if their numbers were demoralized enough to permit of it. I found that chance had come when my men and I happened one day on the remains of the old space ship left from the mutiny. . . . We came across the sealed case of Saturnian bacteria we'd been taking to Mars. Bacteria—multiplying at millions to the hour. Released, the things would wipe out nearly everybody in New York City in a day! But how to get 'em to Earth safely?

"That was a problem. We'd already started a crime ring between worlds having our headquarters here—but this bacteria job needed somebody quite innocent to put it over. Then our New York worker found that my girl was engaged to a guy in charge of the Lunar Observatory my brother had built! Imagine that!"

"Well?" Chris snapped.

"It was easy. By degrees Dorothy was told the truth, brought here to Venus and—"

"I found out in many ways that Red was my father," the girl said briefly. "I'd always disliked my uncle anyway, and I was more than willing to help father. I took the bacteria box to Earth and had it fitted with a selenium cell device. Nobody could risk being within a hundred miles of it when it opened—hence remote control. That night I called to see you at the Observatory I put the box in a corner of the mirror-plate. At moonrise the selenium cell would have operated and released the bacteria — The disease would have begun at the most appropriate spot—in the very building my uncle's ill-gotten gains had built. I intended to depart the moment the plague began. . . ."

"YOU would have exposed me to *that?*" Chris grated out.

"Why not?" Dorothy asked stonily. "I only got engaged to you in the first place because you had a steady job and plenty of money. When I knew about father and his plans you were only a tool— My timidity was a pose, of course. . . . The real trouble was Violet Ray! She poked her nose in and upset the whole thing."

"So I've heard!" Red Tanner breathed venomously. "She blew up the Observatory before the moon rose. How she knew I don't know— Any more than I can figure out why she brought you to Venus, Dorothy. She must have had a *reason*. . . ."

"Then you were responsible for the taxi explosion?" Chris' voice was level and cold.

The girl nodded as she lounged against the table. "Of course. The moment you and uncle had gone I foresaw trouble, phoned our New York agent. I didn't expect him to be quite so drastic, but . . ."

"At least," Chris said quietly, "I see you in your true colors, Dot. And unless I'm mistaken you'll get nowhere with Violet Ray somewhere around. She'll beat you to it. . . ." He broke off, smiled twistedly. "Funny thing, for awhile I suspected you might *be* Violet Ray!"

"I'm a woman, not a freak! And don't be too sure she'll get any place. We've got to find her, dad. For years now she's been beating you to it and—"

"She'll be found," Red said obstinately. "And we'll try other ways to get the mastery over peoples on Earth—" He broke off, looked at Chris malignantly. "As to you, wise guy, you're going to disappear from sight—literally. Start walking!"

Chris stared at the gun in Tanner's hand, then he set his jaw and walked across the cavern into a narrow, natural opening in the rocks. It led into a passage, finally ended at a chasm. From the depths came the faint sound of bubbling and swirling.

"Mud river, joining up with the main tidal flow," explained Tanner's grim voice. "I could shoot you, of course—but I might as well save my ray-gun charge and be rid of you just the same."

Chris stood motionless, tugging futilely on the steel fetters about his wrists. Then he swung round, intent on a last desperate bid for liberty—but the iron knuckles of Red Tanner struck him clean between the

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eyes. Helpless, he toppled backward over the chasm edge, felt himself falling through emptiness—

He tried to measure seconds to eternity—then suddenly he was brought up short in his fall with a jar that shook the breath out of him. He felt himself lifted sideways, tumbled headlong into rubble and dust.

A strong hand jerked him to his feet. Faintly he could make out the outlines of a face framed in dark hair.

"Violet Ray!" he whispered incredulously. "You—you caught me as I fell?"

"Yes." The way she said it it sounded the simplest thing in the world. "I overheard all that went on above. When a person knows Venus as I do lots of things can be done. . . . Come with me."

"These handcuffs," he said, turning his back to her.

He felt her fingers round his wrists, stood in awe as he felt the links of the connecting chain twist and bend under those more than human hands. Suddenly he was free.

"This way," she breathed, catching his arm.

AFTER some minutes they emerged at a lower level. Shafts of daylight seeping through the cavern roof revealed opposite to them a titanic rock, like a pointing finger, some two hundred feet high. Around it there squirted streams of liquid mud from the exterior.

"Down here we're below river level," the girl explained. "That rock there acts as a natural stopcock—but it's on a balance. A little pushing will move it over. The river will sweep into the breach, and since it is at flood tide it will submerge this cavern here, rise up the shaft down which you were thrown and—"

"Trap the others?" Chris asked in a low voice.

"Yes!" Violet Ray's face was as hard as agate. "You're thinking it's murder—but it isn't. It's justice—When you've lived on Venus as long as I have, battling every day with Nature in its cruelest moods, you'll learn to forget sentiment. . . . Those people up there will start again, with unpredictable results unless we strike first. . . . They'll drown, because I've thrown their exit-rock switch out of action."

Chris said nothing. There was a certain heartless streak in her that rather repulsed him at times. And yet, she was logical enough. He stood watching as she vaulted with consummate ease to the rock stepping stones in the midst of the sloppy mud on the cavern floor. He followed her with difficulty, stopped by her side finally immediately below that finger of rock.

"Any help?" he asked, shoving uselessly against the spire.

She did not answer, pushed him aside rather contemptuously. He stood gazing at her taut, shapely legs as she dug her heels in the shingle. The biceps on her arms and shoulders bulged visibly under the strain she suddenly threw upon herself. . . . But the rock moved! It swung very slightly from the perpendicular on a central axis.

Again Violet Ray shoved, and again, her mouth tight with effort—then the rock swung over its gravity-center. The weight of the mud river outside was sufficient to finish the job. It tore the rock off its pivot and a deluge came thundering into the cavern.

Chris found himself dashed from the shingle like a fly. Mud was in his eyes, his nostrils, his mouth. It was like swimming in treacle— Then a hand of steel was on his shirt collar. He felt himself dragged upwards, caught a glimpse of a mud-caked golden arm driving with irresistible force through the cloying, sticky mess. He was impelled outward against the current, held his breath as he forced below the river at the cavern mouth . . . then up he came again with that hand still holding him.

He fought his way by his own efforts across the actual river, with the girl right beside him. He could see the vast flow sweeping inwards into the mountain breach, steadily rising even as he watched it. . . . Then at last he felt stones under his feet, floundered up onto the rubbly bank with the mud-plastered girl behind him.

FOR a moment or two she stood watching the flow, wiping the filth from her face.

"I rather think," she said slowly, "that the first link in the crime ring has snapped right here. . . . Ruthless perhaps—but necessary."

Chris caught her arm. "The first link!" he echoed. "You mean there are others?"

"Of course," she answered quietly. "Do you think that that brute of a Red Tanner was the *master* of the whole thing? Oh, no. If he said he was that was just his ego. The bacteria idea was planned by a far cleverer mind than his. Believe me, Chris, there is crime-in all parts of the system and Red and his daughter were only spokes in the wheel. I don't know who is back of the troubles, who is trying to master the earth by various diabolical means—but I'll find out. One day . . ."

"Just how did you know about that bacteria attempt?" Chris asked.

"Simple enough," the girl shrugged, peeling mud from her hands. "I knew for a long time that Tanner was on Venus, and from the records of the original ship I knew that he was the original cause of the mutiny. Knowing Venus so well it was no effort for me to locate his hide-out. I had other ways of getting into his place; the mountain is honeycombed. I heard everything he ever had to say, that's why I know he's only a part of the crime ring and not the head of it. . . . Three times he tried to wipe me out, most unsuccessfully.

"Recently I was astonished to find that the case of bacteria had gone from the original ship. I knew Tanner must be responsible, and sure enough I finally overheard of his plans, of how his daughter was to fix them on the lunar phototelescope on a specified

(continued on page 63

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CITY UNDER THE SEA

How could a giant ocean liner sink in a calm, without survivors? Gerry Van Dine and his best friend, Kemp Martin went down into the depths to find—a weird city!

By NAT SCHACHNER

CHAPTER I
The Sinking of the Oceanic

THE girl in the reception room of the Van Dine Lines said: "Mr. Van Dine is busy in conference just now, Mr. Martin."

"What of it?" I retorted coolly, and swung the latched gate open with the ball of my thumb. As I eased my short, rather chunky body through, I inquired impolitely over my shoulder: "Playing solitaire with himself, eh?"

It was notorious that young Gerry Van Dine, christened Gerald, was the most reluctant third vice-president the famous Van Dine lines ever had. He would much rather be up at his private shipyard at City Island, clad in old dungarees, engaged in putting the last finishing touches to the special depth submarine he had invented. But his father, Howard Van Dine, was fast reaching the age of retirement, and insisted that his son spend a reasonable amount of time at the offices of the great steamship line to which he was heir.

The girl protested with a faint smile. "Not this time, Mr. Martin. He's in conference with his father."

"That's fine," I said and kept on walking. "I'll see 'em both, and kill two birds with one visit."

The girl shrugged her shapely shoulders and turned back to her desk. She was used to my little ways. Hell, a man has some rights, if he's known the Van Dines, father, and son, as long as I have! Gerry and I had chummed and fought together since boyhood; we had galloped simultaneously through Sheff Scientific; we had loved the same girl. But here there had been no dead heat. Gerry, with his two-headed blondness and infectious grin, had won by a nose. Well, I was resigned to that by now. I hadn't really expected Marion to fall for my homely and undistinguished phiz. As a matter of fact, I was to be best man at the wedding.

I turned the knob of the door marked *Private*, and entered unceremoniously.

"Hello, Mr. Van Dine. Hello Gerry. How's the prospective bridegroom, you undeserving scoundrel?"

I stopped short. The two men had swerved in their chairs at my gusty entrance. Howard Van Dine, with his fine, aristocratic face and thin, high-bridged nose. Gerry, young, well put together, irregularly featured, yet wholeheartedly handsome when his famous grin lit up. But there was no hint of merriment in the blank, tragic stare that both of them turned my way. Gerry's face was white with repression, his blue eyes smoldering embers. Mr. Van Dine, Sr.'s nose was twitching slightly, always a sign of trouble. He held a thin slip of blue and white paper in his hand, and his hand trembled uncontrollably. Neither of them spoke.

"Sorry," I muttered, and felt behind me for the knob.

Gerry seemed to come out of his trance. "Don't go, Kemp," he said in a hard, dry voice. "I may need you."

I paused in midflight, looking from one to the other. "What's wrong?"

"The *Oceanic* went down this morning with all on board."

"Good Lord," I ejaculated. "That's the third of your boats in a month."

Mr. Van Dine nodded jerkily. His nose was twitching violently now. "Yes," he said, "same place too."

It stunned me. What strange fatality was overtaking the Van Dine Lines? I remembered the sensation the other two sinkings had caused. Now the *Oceanic!* All three crack liners, all New York bound from London, and all disappearing without a trace, without a clue as to what had happened, not fifty miles out of New York harbor, just where the continental shelf drops suddenly into the depths.

Mr. Van Dine held up the fluttering slip of paper. It was a radiogram. "Just received this from the destroyer *Erebus*. They heard a single SOS, giving name and position. The wireless stopped suddenly, in the middle of a word. The *Erebus* got to the given position an hour later, and found loose gear floating

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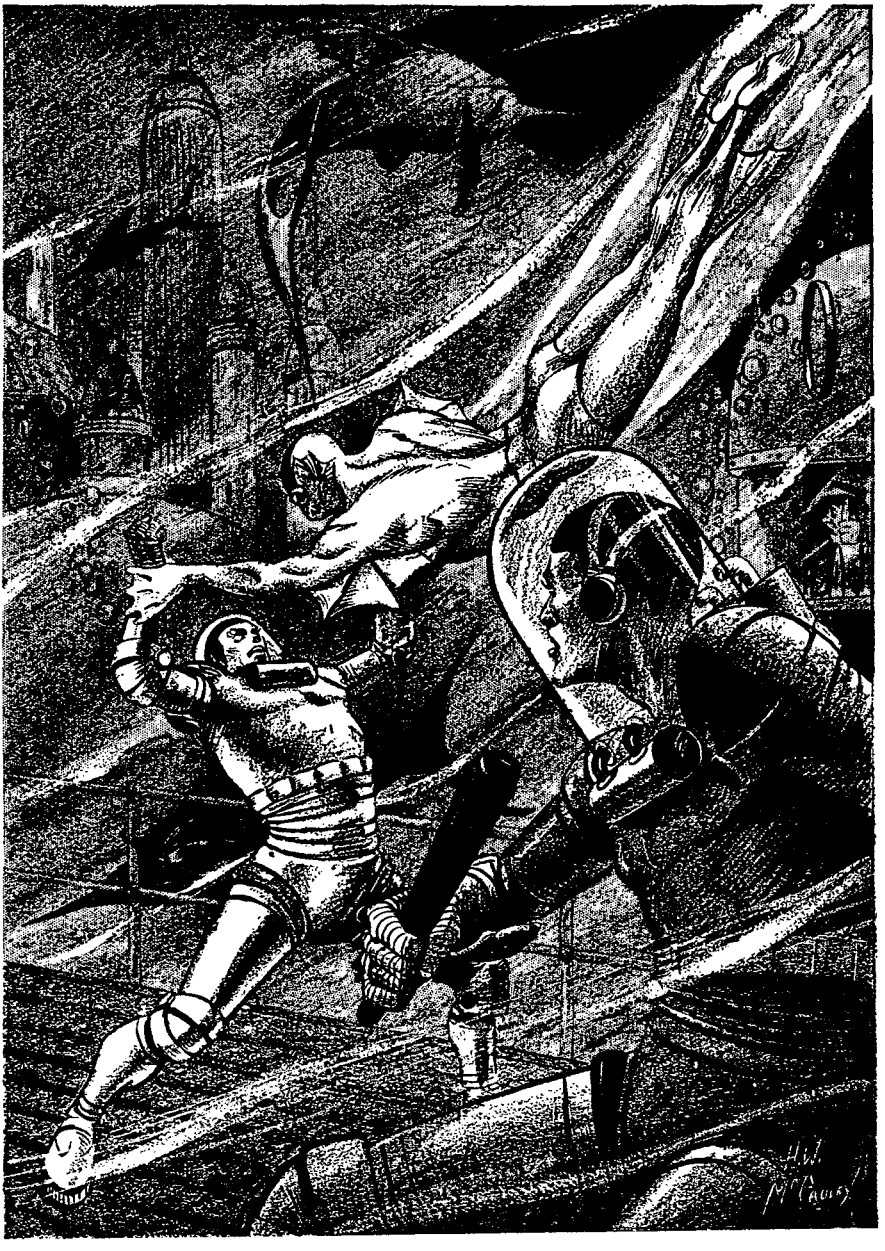

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around, some oil. Nothing else."

He stopped, his eyes shifting to avoid mine. Gerry said nothing, but the bones of his face showed white through the tight-drawn skin.

I glanced keenly from one to the other. "Out with it," I snapped. "You're holding out on me."

"Yes," Gerry's voice was barely audible. "Marion was on the *Oceanic*."

I STOOD there gaping like a fish, my heart turning sickening flip-flops within my breast. Marion Dale —lovely, slim, with her clear, golden-tanned skin and merry laugh, and those green-flecked hazel eyes of hers that looked so frankly out upon a sun-shiny world—Marion—dead! Gerry and I had both loved her and Gerry had won, and I was to be best man. Marion—dead!

"B-but," I stammered inanely, "she wasn't due till next week. Her passage was booked on the *Atlantic*, wasn't it?"

Gerry smiled bitterly, a smile that was frozen with agony. "She cabled she was changing over. Wanted the thrill of being on one of *our* liners."

Then he broke. His head went into his hands and great dry sobs shook him. Mr. Van Dine put his arm around his son's shoulders. "Take it easy, my boy," he warned.

Gerry shook off the restraining hand gently, rose to his full six feet. His eyes were blazing cold, the muscles of his jaw were set in hard ridges.

"I'm taking the *Sea Scorpion* out this afternoon."

The *Sea Scorpion* was his submarine, the second he had built. Planned for submergence to greater depths than had ever been possible before.

I looked at him blankly. "What for?" I asked feebly.

"What for?" he echoed harshly. "Do you think those boats sank of themselves? In a sea that was smooth as a pond, without a hatful of breeze stirring? At almost exactly the same spot and under the same circumstances? There's something damnably wrong out there, and I'm going to find out what it is, if it's the last thing I do on earth. I don't give a hoot about the ships, that's only money; but there were thousands of people who weren't given a chance, and there was —Marion."

His father lifted his head suddenly. "Gerry—I wonder if you know that all three boats were carrying secret shipments of gold bars, some ten millions worth?"

Gerry nodded silently.

"But damn it, man," I cried almost angrily. "You can't take the *Sea Scorpion* out by yourself. You need a crew for one thing, and it's too small, for another. Now if the *Sea Squid* hadn't gone down . . ."

"Yes," he interrupted softly. "But the *Sea Squid* sank almost six months ago, and do you know where? I'll tell you. It was almost exactly at the same spot, and in *exactly* the same way. A sudden cry for help from Garlon Petrie, and then the wireless went blank. Nothing to show after except some oil floating on the surface."

"I didn't know that," I told him. I had been away building a railroad in Bolivia when it had happened. Trying to forget about Marion, too.

"Poor Garlon," said Gerry. "He was the first to get smashed by the menace. I could have used him now."

That made me really angry. Of course, Garlon Petrie was a great engineer, a genius almost. He and Gerry had worked together on the depth submarine. Neither could have finished it without the other; their ideas dovetailed nicely. And Gerry's money backed them to the limit. But I never had liked the man. He was a sallow skinned individual, with smoldering, secretive eyes and straight, coarse black hair. His thin lips were always tightly compressed as though eternally withholding some secret.

When the *Sea Squid* had been finally completed, ready for a test, Gerry was down with a bad case of grippe. It devolved upon Garlon to try her out. He assembled a crew, slipped out of the ways, and went out to sea. At fifty miles out he was going to submerge, he had announced, and try for record depths. That was the last ever seen of the craft. A short frantic SOS, followed by silence!

It had been a great blow to Gerry. But immediately upon his recovery, he had shaken his head grimly, and plunged into the construction of another submarine, alone. Much smaller this one, for he was gambling—gambling that the *Sea Squid* had not sunk because of fundamental errors in construction.

"Garlon knew submarines, I grant you," I said heatedly, "but that doesn't mean I'm not as good as that fish-faced guy any day. What do you mean you could have used him? I'm here, am I not? And what's more, Gerald Van Dine," I shook a finger under his nose, "I'm going with you, whether you like it or not. I—I was rather fond of Marion," I ended inanely.

Gerry's features softened. "I know you were, Kemp," he answered, gripping me by the shoulder. "And you *are* coming. I couldn't have a better man along."

All taffy of course, but it makes a man feel good even when he knows it's not true.

Mr. Van Dine was standing now; looking sharply at us. His nose twitched violently, but his voice was steady. "God knows on what sort of a wild goose chase you two are going. I ought to forbid it, but I can't. Only promise that you won't take any undue chances. If you find anything wrong, radio for assistance. I'll see to it there are destroyers standing by."

"We promise, dad."

THEN we were out of the office, with a hectic morning ahead. There were supplies to be purchased, tanks of compressed oxygen to be installed, batteries

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to be tested, and all the little odds and ends to be performed on a boat, when outfitting for a long cruise.

"We don't know where we're going, nor how long we'll be there," Gerry observed grimly.

But the Van Dine name was a talisman, the Van Dine millions a performer of miracles, and Gerry Van Dine a driving fount of energy. So that at two o'clock that afternoon, just four hours after we got started, the last bit of equipment had been carefully gone over, supplies had been stowed in ship-shape fashion, and the last of a small army of suddenly mobilized workmen was just as suddenly demobilized.

We were ready to go!

Gerry went over his craft with a sort of fierce pride, testing every last connection, every valve personally. Even back in Tech, submarines had been an obsession with him, and here was his dream in the flesh. I followed him around, staring meekly. I had never seen the boat before. My engineering knack ran to railroads and bridges; I knew nothing of ships in any form, but even my untrained eyes disclosed to me that this was a novel underwater craft.

It was fish-shaped, gracefully streamlined, and tapering to long blunt-nosed rams at either end. The hull and superstructure were of beryllium-steel, immensely thick. The internal combustion engines were miracles of compactness and driving energy and had been adapted to underwater propulsion. Gerry had very c..erly evolved an exhaust system to lead the gases of combustion into the ballast tanks, where they were harmlessly dissipated. Accordingly, there were no storage batteries.

The hydroplane vanes too, were peculiarly curved, not flat as was customary. Gerry explained that they gave better stability of control. The submarine was equipped to the last detail. Powerful searchlights of Gerry's own invention that could cut the water for considerable distances, special sono-devices, ejector tube with airlock, oxygenation apparatus that could keep the interior sweet and clean for over two weeks, rigid diver's suits of beryllium-steel, built to withstand tremendous pressures, with oxygen tanks and compact communication units for underwater use.

The whole craft was small, hardly more than a model. The tiny cubbyhole within could accommodate at the most, three persons; yet it looked thoroughly staunch and seaworthy.

I shrugged my shoulders, concealed whatever misgivings I had and said; "Let's go."

"Right," said Gerry, and herded me inside. The hatch to the tiny deck clamped to overhead.

THE sub was already off the ways, floating free in thirty feet of water. Gerry did things to the engine, and it sprang into instant, purring life. Then he turned valves. There was a hiss of inrushing waters. The ballast tanks were filling. I had an odd sensation that we were sinking, yet so smooth was our descent that I couldn't trace it to anything in particular.

Gerry watched his depth meter. At twenty feet, he held the sub steady. Then we started. No one had seen us submerge; no one knew our destination.

At dusk of that midsummer day we reached the place, almost fifty miles out. The little sub was functioning perfectly.

We came to the surface then to get our bearings. I stepped out on the tiny deck eagerly. Who knew, it might be the last sight I would ever have of sun and sky and clean sweet air.

The deck was awash with the great regular rollers of the interminable ocean. A narrow horizon circumscribed our view. A westering sun was plunging into the heaving depths. All around us floated bits of wood, spars, coiling ropes, tackle blocks, flotsam and jetsam of a wreck. The surface of the water was slimy with oil.

Gerry's face hardened. There was no doubt we were directly at the spot where the *Oceanic* had taken her tragic plunge into the depths.

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"We're going down to find her," his voice was harsh with pain. "I want to know what happened, and I want to find—"

"Yes, of course," I interposed hastily, and shuddered. A drowned body is not pleasant to look at, especially if fish had gotten at it. "But there's a depth of several hundred fathoms here. No sub has ever gone down that far."

"This one will," he retorted confidently. "I built her for just that."

I looked around a last time. A black smudge came crawling over the horizon, trailing long streamers of smoke.

"A destroyer," said Gerry, shading his eyes. "Below, Kemp. We're submerging at once."

Once more I heard the clang of doom over my head as the hatches clamped to. Then we were sinking with a rush. The searchlights sprang into illumination. Their spreading rays lit up the still, black waters, brought the images back to ground glass visors.

Already we were down two hundred feet, and still sinking steadily, though the speed of our descent had slackened. Small wavering shapes floated by on the visors—fish. Not many though. The depths of the ocean seemed deserted, black with eternal midnight, sinister.

A huge black mass drifted into the vision, a thing of waving slimy arms. A round fierce eye stared at us unwinking, balefully. Then it was gone.

"Octopus," said Gerry briefly.

And still we sank. Three hundred, four hundred, five hundred feet. No sub had ever gone down so far. I looked anxiously about. The pressure must be terrific. Half fearfully, I watched for sprung plates, tiny leaks that would widen into overwhelming Niagaras. But everything was intact, sound. The engines purred their sturdy song. Gerry was stony-faced, immobile, watching with fierce intensity only one visor—that

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which reflected the depth searchlight.

Six hundred feet down now, our depth meter showed, and the visor reflected far below an interminable solid stretch. The bottom of the ocean. Thick, primordial ooze it seemed, the detritus of uncounted ages. It was flat, flat as a Kansas prairie, but at one end there appeared the beginning of a regular upward swelling. The screen cut off the rest of it.

"Look, Gerry," I said. "That's funny. Turn the searchlight over to the left. I want to—"

That was as far as I got. For on the farther side came heaving into view sharp angles and jutting black fingers—the unmistakable outlines of a huge liner. It was the *Oceanic*, in her last tragic resting place. We had reached the end of our quest.

CHAPTER II

On the Ocean Floor

THE *Sea Scorpion* settled gently down into the ooze, close to the towering bulk of the great liner. A tomb—a thing of steel and wood and the already rotting flesh of over two thousand beings who had only that morning lived and breathed and loved.

Gerry's voice came to me, staccato, hard.

"Into the diving suit, Kemp."

In a daze I obeyed; pouring my chunky body into its unyielding mold with much grunting and labored breathing, admiring the swift, effortless movements of my companion. Last came the helmets, great globular beryllium-steel and quartz affairs, with a compact oxygen-release tank nestling not too comfortably against the back of my head. We helped each other screw the things into place.

Without a word we stepped into the ejector-lock, heard the slide hiss to behind us. Gerry turned a valve and water started gushing in. It filled rapidly. Then a final flip and the door to the unknown opened. We stepped out together. The flashes, set in our helmets like miner's torches, sent elongated cones of light stabbing into the depths. Our weighted feet sank heavily into the soft, porous ooze. All about us, outside the thin illumination of our flashes, was blackness; profound, inky almost physical blackness. No least ray of the sun filtered down to these tremendous depths.

We plodded forward, dragging our legs through the slime. Ahead, and as far up as our flashes could carry, loomed the giant bulk of the *Oceanic*, already settled into the soft muck. What was waiting for us in these sinister depths? The black, still reaches held some terrible secret. No fish swam into our range of illumination, no sign of life whatever. The appalling gloom was deserted.

An uneasy feeling that we were being followed held me. Several times I turned quickly. The stabbing beam disclosed nothing. But again and again I turned; I almost felt the impact of invisible eyes focused on the back of my head. Once I thought I caught a fleeting glimpse of a black shape slipping out of the wavering edge of illumination.

Gerry trudged ahead, eyes always to the front, where the *Oceanic* lay. I said nothing of my fears.

Now we were right under the exposed, overarching bow. An exclamation from Gerry came to me through the tiny receiving unit in my helmet. I stopped horrified. We knew now how the great liner had been sunk. A huge, ragged tear showed its gaping maw in the hull. The thick steel plates had been literally shattered to pieces by the force of the explosion. A powerful submarine mine had done the trick.

"I thought, as much," I heard Gerry's voice, metallic and harsh, through the communication unit. "The *Oceanic* was the victim of a man-made catastrophe. That mine was fastened to the bottom of the ship, and exploded. It could never have done such damage otherwise."

I was bewildered, stunned, at the confirmation of my nebulous ideas.

"Who could have done this?" I asked craftily. "And why?"

"The *why* is easy. They were after the gold. The *who* is what I'm going to find out. It's a submarine all right, and one that has all our ideas too. Poor Garlon must have blundered into him and died for it."

I kept my counsel. "Let's look inside," I suggested. "Maybe we can find a clue in there."

I didn't like the place where we were standing. I could have sworn that we were being watched, weighed, by invisible things all around us. Yet wherever I stabbed suddenly with my beam, nothing showed—nothing but wastes of water, pressing down upon us with terrific force. I would feel better inside the ship, where I could see what I was up against.

"Very well," said Gerry, and we stepped into the gashed bowels of the ship. We climbed cautiously up and up, through the piled-up wreckage of the hold, past the engine room, shuddered away from contact with lolling smashed-in bodies whose faces were sodden, unrecognizable pulps.

Gerry knew the *Oceanic* well. He finally reached his destination—the steel-lined treasure room. Then he swore, deeply. A section of the steel door had been neatly cut out, and the beams of light that we threw into the dank interior disclosed its emptiness. The treasure of gold bars—ten million dollars' worth—was gone.

"Stolen!"

"And here are the thieves," I cried, as I jerked around swiftly. I caught a glimpse of a figure, snatched at my knife, and struck out with an unwieldy arm.

MORE figures shot into the illumination out of nowhere and came at me with a smooth, graceful rush. I went down in a smother of clinging bodies. I heard a gasp of surprise from Gerry, and then I was

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fighting for my life. I hit out with weighted legs and arms, but the pressure of the water took all the force out of my blows. I didn't have a chance. My antagonists, silent, swift, sure of themselves in these strange depths, had my arms pinioned in a trice. The electric torch in my helmet was smashed with a well directed blow. Blackness enveloped me. I struggled feebly. I was borne along, not knowing where I went. I thought I heard a faint far-off cry from Gerry; then there was only silence.

I shall never forget that nightmare journey. Pushed through unyielding darkness at the bottom of the ocean by invisible captors. The short glimpse I had had of them was fantastic, unbelievable. What were they?

After what seemed hours I felt myself coming to a halt. The creatures that held me fumbled with something. A rush of sucking waters swept me off my feet. I was carried along a short distance, and again motion ceased. Then I sensed rather than felt the lightening of pressure on the upper portion of my body, as though the waters were receding.

It flashed on me then. I was in a lock of sorts, the water was being pumped out. Was I about to be led into some strange civilization beneath the bed of old ocean? Possibly that peculiar, regular swelling to which I had tried to call Gerry's attention was the roof.

More fumbling. Then a huge panel slid open in front of me. A wave of illumination beat in suddenly upon my dazzled eyes. Numerous hands had urged me through.

I was standing at the edge of a city of irregularly scattered mud hovels, shaped exactly like beehives. The whole of this interior world was circular, not over a mile in diameter, and over-arched by a soaring rocky dome. The ceiling rock gleamed with golden pinpoints of light that furnished an even illumination. Doubtless the rock was highly radioactive.

But it was the first full sight of my captors that evoked my utmost astonishment. There were a half dozen of them. They were *men,* but strange, fantastic. Their skins were olive-green and supple-leathered like the skin of a shark. Their heads were elongated like fish-heads, with mouths that were straight gashes, and peculiar feathered openings on either cheekbone. Gills slits. Their hands and feet had strong, webbed membranes between the fingers and toes.

These were not fishes who somehow had grown into the semblance of men; rather they were men who had degenerated into fish. It was evident too that they were equally at home in water and out.

Then my attention was distracted by a commotion in back of me. The next moment Gerry was catapulted from the lock into our midst, grotesque in his huge suit, lashing out with weighted hands and feet at a clinging dozen of these strange denizens of the deep.

The fightingest fool that ever was. I grinned and yelled within my helmet. "Stop scrapping, you idiot. You're only making it tougher for me."

He struggled upright with a heave of his armored shoulders that sent the whole dozen flying in all directions. I could hear his joyful whoop as his goggled eyes glared blankly in my direction.

"Kemp, you old son," he shouted. "I thought they had killed you."

"I'm too tough," I said, "but there comes the leader. He's saying things; but I can't hear him."

Sure enough, the tallest of my captors had approached me; his straight gash of a mouth gulping peculiarly, his webbed arms gesticulating. I looked at him puzzled. Then it dawned on me.

"He wants us to take off our suits, Gerry," I yelled in the transmitter. "Think it wise?"

He grunted. "Must be air in here. They seemed to be breathing. We've got to take the chance anyway; our oxygen can't last much longer."

"O. K." We edged heavily over to each other, the suits dragging us down with their weight. The fish-men, or men-fish, made way for us. I worked clumsily at Gerry's helmet; he reciprocated with mine. Very cautiously we lifted them, ready to clamp down again if there were no breathable air; but the first gulp satisfied me. It was rather heavy and saturated, but it would do.

Gerry stared at me whimsically. "What's next?"

"They seem to know," I said. The fish-men were pointing to a mud hovel that towered over the others, and were unmistakably gesturing that there was our destination.

"All right," said Gerry, "take us there."

Their leader scowled ferociously.

"You follow me." That was all he said, but if it had been an explosion we could not have jumped more. He had spoken in English!

"Listen, fellow," I cried, after I had caught my breath, "where did you learn that?"

"Me know plenty" he answered surlily. "You come see Emperor; me no talk to you."

"Nice, pleasant chap," I commented. Gerry took a step forward, his face black with anger. Instantly the leader whistled peculiarly. A dozen fish-men threw themselves on us. Their webbed fingers contacted with our bare heads before we could move in our weighted suits. A paralyzing vibration passed through my body, leaving me rigid, helpless. Our fish-men were electric too!

We were unceremoniously picked up and carted along on the shoulders of these underocean denizens as though we were mummies. We soon reached the entrance to the large structure that was our destination. It was made of smooth, yellow clay, about thirty feet in diameter, and tapering to a point the same distance up. I was pushed through the narrow opening and deposited upright, Gerry next to me in the middle of the huge clay chamber. We were rigid in every limb.

At the farther end stood a group. My eyes focused

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on them unbelievingly. I had suspected something, but this was incredible. Seven men, earth-men, dressed in normal earthclothes, were grinning evilly at us.

CHAPTER III

Garlon Petrie Again

"GARLON PETRIE!" The name tore rasping out of Gerry's throat.

I disregarded the other six, who were the usual run of savage, furtive-eyed rascals who can be picked up in the dives of any big city to cut a throat for a ten dollar bill, and fastened my gaze upon the tall, sallow, black-haired man with the thin compressed lips.

He leaned forward a little and smiled. Not with his lips—those seemed to remain eternally shut even when he talked—but with a twitch of his sallow cheeks that made it into an evil grimace.

"Yes," he said softly, "Garlon Petrie himself. You are surprised, my friend?"

Gerry had gone white at the first sight of his former co-worker; now the red flooded suddenly into his cheeks. His blue eyes burned with strange flames. He tried to throw himself forward, but the paralysis held us tight in its grip.

"Garlon Petrie!" Strange how deadly cold his voice was. "The man I trusted. I see it all now. You used my money, my ideas, for your own ends. This devil's work is all of your making."

"Correct in every detail," the sallow man bowed mockingly. "Except that your ideas were very commonplace; I did not need them. Your money, yes. Did you think," his voice rose with sudden passion, "I was content to complete this brain child of mine, this submarine, and stand by to see it used by others, with merely a thanks to me?" His eyes glittered. "No, my friend, I had a definite goal in mind. The wealth of the world, power; that's what I want, and what I am going to get with this toy." His long, talon-like fingers curved inward as if he already had the world by the throat.

"Your illness was a lucky break. I picked my crew carefully." He waved a hand at the glowering cutthroats at his back. "I picked the spot to disappear, sent out an SOS to give the idea I had met with an accident. It was my intention to work back to shore under water to a place I had prepared, and use that as a base for operations."

His eyes smoldered on the surly fish-men who stood apart. "I found these animals, ripped a few of them apart with torpedoes. The rest yielded quickly enough." He laughed throatily. It seemed I detected a flare of hate in the fish-men's eyes. "I'm Emperor here. This is a much better base to work from. Every ship that sails the ocean shall pay me tribute, or sink. I've already shown what I can do."

Gerry was white again. "I do not mind the rotten scurvy trick you played me. I do not mind the loss of my money and ships. But you went further. You destroyed the lives of thousands of innocent people, and among them," his face was set and terrible, "was the girl I loved."

Garlon chuckled nastily. "Ah yes, the very delightful Marion Dale. A most delicate morsel. I myself admired her immensely, and wondered what she saw in your gross, overgrown beef."

Gerry spoke low. "You have said enough, Garlon. I shall kill you for this."

Two spots of red burned in the man's sallow cheeks. Gerry had finally gotten under his skin. He took a short step forward and hit Gerry hard with the flat of his hand. "For that you die tomorrow. It won't be an easy death either. And Marion shall see you die."

"Marion." The exclamation came simultaneously from both our throats. "She's alive!"

"Of course." Garlon was enjoying himself. "I knew she was on the *Oceanic* just as I knew there was gold on board. I have sources for obtaining information. While the boat was sinking, I climbed on board, unnoticed in the confusion, brought her back to the submarine. Shall I show her to you?"

WITHOUT waiting for a reply, he uttered a sharp command to the leader of the fish-men. "Ugru, bring the girl here."

Ugru salaamed sullenly and went out. My heart was bounding. Marion alive, Ugru and the fish-men manifestly disaffected, hating their conquerors. My brain teemed, while my body was rigid as ever in the paralysis. Gerry's face was ablaze; but he said nothing.

A padding of feet at the door. I tried to twist my head and could not. Then a girl was brought forward, held firmly by Ugru. It was Marion, lovely and slim as ever, but looking white and worn. Yet her proud little head was held high. She gazed up at Garlon's cold, cruel eyes fearlessly.

His features twisted. "Look behind you," he told her. "Some friends of yours who haven't long to live."

At a gesture, Ugru pivoted her around. Then she saw the two of us, rigid, paralyzed, with our hearts shining nakedly in our eyes.

The girl's startled eyes passed me by unseeing, fastened themselves with desperate eagerness upon Gerry. A flame leaped and as quickly died.

"Gerry, darling, you—here!"

He was looking on her as one resurrected from the dead. "Yes, dear. And now that I know you are alive, nothing can stop us."

"Say Chief, let me burn him now." One of the gutter rats in the background had stepped forward, his beady eyes glittering with coke, a bluenosed automatic thrusting in his hand.

Petrie waved him back without taking his eyes off Gerry.

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"Shut up, Spike," he said. "He dies tomorrow, and the way I want."

Horror sprang into the girl's face. "No! No!" she panted.

Petrie snarled like a fanged wolf about to strike. "He dies. He has discovered my secret; he stands in my way with you." His tone changed. "Enough, I have had my sport. I am weary of you now." He clapped his hands. "Strip off their suits, Ugru; they won't need them any more. Keep them paralyzed and under guard. Your life shall answer if they escape."

Ugru salaamed deeply. Underneath his veiled eyes I noted again, this time quite plainly, the welling hatred of the conquered.

Webbed hands lifted us out of our diver's suits, left us in our steret clothes.

"As for you, my Marion," Petrie smiled crookedly at her, "from now on you shall be guarded by my own men. I don't trust the Keras. They're fish, but still men."

Spike sprang forward eagerly. "I'll watch her for you, Chief."

Garlon thrust him back with a careless hand. "I don't trust you either. You keep away from the girl, d'ye hear?"

Spike's face wreathed into a look of animal rage, but his voice was placating. "Aw, Chief," he whined, "I didn't mean nothing."

"You had better not. She's not for you and the sooner you find that out, the better off you'll be. Red, *you* go with her, and remember what I told Spike."

"O. K., Chief." A brutal faced thug shambled forward, his long, hairy arms gangling like an ape's, his unkempt hair and beard fiery red.

The last I saw as Gerry and I were hurried ungently out of the room, rigid on the shoulders of the fish-men, was Marion crouching away from Red's grip, and the look compounded of lust and hatred on Spike's face.

OUR prison was not far away. We were dumped unceremoniously into the interior of a smaller building, and stood up against the clay wall at an angle as though we were wax figures. Ugru sat himself down next to us, his eyes sullen, but watchful. Outside the open door, I saw two other of the Keras range themselves. We were well guarded.

"Kemp." Gerry was speaking softly.

"Yes?"

"Parle Francais. Cet homme de poisson ne comprend pas." (Speak in French. The fish-man won't understand.)

"Oui."

Ugru watched us suspiciously. It was obvious he did not understand this gibberish.

"Can you move at all?"

"Not the slightest," I confessed, "though I've been trying hard enough."

"Listen," Gerry talked rapidly. "Ugru must know a way out. He has no cause to love Petrie and his band of cutthroats. Maybe he will help us."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," I admitted.

Gerry turned his eyes on the blank-faced Kera. "You do not like the Emperor?" he asked softly, in English.

The fish-man's eyes flashed with swift hatred; then clouded in startled terror. "No, no! Me do. You shut up."

Gerry pressed his advantage. "No, you don't. I saw it, and I don't blame you. He has conquered your people; he has made slaves out of them."

Again that flash of hatred, again the swift filming into terror. Ugru cast an uneasy glance at the guards outside the entrance. "You crazy. He good man. You shut up or I kill."

Gerry lowered his voice, went on persuasively. "You need not be afraid of us. We hate him more than you do. He has killed my people from the great world outside, he has stolen my girl. Help us get free, and we will help you get free. You can once more rule your own kind down here without interference."

It was a chance shot, but from the way Ugru's head lifted and his eyes flashed, it was evident that it had struck home. Ugru had been *Emperor* before the coming of Petrie!

Gerry went on as though he had not noticed. "When we go away from here, we shall forget that we ever found this place. No other people from the great air-world shall come down to molest you."

Ugru looked at him fearfully, yet with dawning hope. Gerry's voice had rung with sincerity, his face was candid and frank. I watched the struggle going on in the fish-man with a fierce eagerness. On the outcome of that struggle depended all our lives. Fear of the stranger Petrie and his cohorts, with their terrible weapons—torpedoes, automatics, hand grenades; against which the Keras had only their paralyzing touch, effective only on actual contact.

AT last Ugru came cautiously to his feet. The Emperor in him had won against the frightened savage. "Me help you," he said passionately. "Me help kill new Emperor. We old people, very old. Once we live in air world like you. Then storms come. Island covered with water. Not much. People learn to swim; live in water well as air. Then more storms come. Island sink altogether bottom ocean. Most people drowned. Some learned already live like fish. Ocean sink deeper and deeper, slow. Old people find this place; live here ever since. Me, Emperor." He beat his breast proudly. "Everything good, till new Emperor come. Kill lots people; take my place."

Gerry and I stared at each other.

"Good Lord," I said, "Then the legend of *Atlantis* was true after all!"

But Gerry was already talking to the Kera. "We'll

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help you get all that back. Listen, Ugru, can you release us from this paralysis?"

The fish-man came to himself with a start. He nodded, approached us. His webbed hand caressed the rigid backs of our heads, each in turn. I felt a flow of warmth careening through me. I essayed gingerly to move a leg; exclaimed joyfully as it shifted its position.

We worked our limbs vigorously until circulation was fully restored. Gerry wasted no time. "We'll have to move rapidly. Find Marion, and escape."

I waxed sarcastic. "How, may I ask? We're not Keras to swim out at the bottom of the ocean."

Gerry looked blank. "I forgot about that." Our suits were in the building where Petrie and his men were. Then his face set grimly. "We'll rush them."

"With bare hands against automatics?" I argued. "No sir, leave me out of that picture. Besides, even if we got them, how would we find the *Sea Scorpion?* We don't even know in what direction it is."

"I have it," Gerry grinned. "*The Sea Squid.*"

"Fine," I agreed heartily, "but where is it?"

"I'll find out. Ugru, where does the Emperor keep the boat he came in?"

"Emperor he keep it over there." A sweeping gesture showed the general direction.

"Is there a lock there also?"

"Yes, yes. He big one. Boat fit in."

"Splendid. Let's get started." Gerry started for the door.

"No." Ugru held him with a detaining hand. "Get killed. Wait dark."

"Dark?" Gerry echoed in surprise. "You mean to say you have nights down here?"

Ugru shrugged. "No understand, night. Emperor, he no like all time light. Do something make black; everyone go to sleep."

"A new wrinkle," said Gerry with grudging admiration. "The scoundrel *is* a genius. Must be blanketing the radio-active emanations with some sort of wave screen. Well, we'll wait, though it's hard."

"Come soon," said Ugru, and glided out of the hut to the guards. We heard them in rapid, hissing converse; then he was back, smiling as broadly as his thin gash of a mouth would permit.

"Kera happy," he announced. "One go tell other Kera; they help. Other stay with us."

CHAPTER IV

Battle on the Sea Floor

THE next two hours seemed centuries, yet they ended finally. It became dark; swiftly, suddenly, like a tropical sunset. We could not see each other; it was so inky.

"Now," whispered Gerry, groping toward me.

"Not yet," Ugru's voice came out of the blackness firmly. "They go sleep first. Lie down, shut eyes, look dead." His tone conveyed withering contempt. Evidently in the course of what might be termed evolution, these Keras who once were men had dispensed with the art of sleeping.

Again we had to acknowledge the logic of his reasoning. We waited again. We had no weapons! To all our inquiries Ugru had shaken his head. There was no wood in this underground cave of ocean; not even a stone. The ground was silt hardened to clay, smooth and bare. I confess I did not relish the prospect; fists against bullets; but Gerry seemed to anticipate the coming fray with a good deal of enjoyment.

At last Ugru hissed to us. It was time! We rose and stealthily edged our way out of the building. The other guard had gone to join his comrades. Our eyes tried vainly to pierce the impenetrable dark. Ugru had no difficulty; he was accustomed to the sunless depths of the sea. We went along in line, Gerry's outstretched fingertips resting in the small of the fish-man's back, and mine on Gerry's.

Our plan of action had been carefully mapped. First we were going to the building in which Marion was captive; overpower her guard. Then on to Petrie and his cohorts. The Keras—there were only some half thousand left in their degraded state—were massing silently in a cordon around the Emperor's structure. At a signal we were to rush the place, ourselves in the van. The Keras had a wholesome respect for the weapons of the white men.

Through the profound dark we crept, following Ugru's unerring course. A silence as dense as the night enveloped us; not a light glimmered. My heart was pounding away; we were approaching the climax of our mad adventure.

Suddenly I bumped headlong into Gerry. He had stopped short.

"What the—" I commenced angrily.

"Sssh," he whispered. "Look."

Ahead of us and a little to the left, I caught a thin flicker of light. Then it was gone. Two seconds passed, and the pencil of light gleamed momentarily on the ground some paces further on, and was out again, like a snuffed candle.

"What in the world can it be?" I asked softly.

Gerry's voice floated back. "Someone else is on the trail tonight. A human being too! A Kera wouldn't need a light. Doesn't want to be seen, either. Watch."

Several times the strange flash lit up the ground, and flicked out, moving steadily ahead of us.

Ugru was back with us now, hissing excitedly. "He one of Emperor's people. Going same place we go. Air generator place—where woman prisoner."

I clutched Gerry by the arm. "Come on; there'll be fireworks soon. I expected this." I literally dragged him along. Ugru followed. The intermittent, receding flash ahead was a sufficient guide. If only things broke right!

The light stopped short, went out.

I stopped also. "That must be the air generator building and Marion's prison," I whispered. "Walk softly."

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Ugru led the way again. We made no sound as we tiptoed on the firm clay.

Ugru's webbed hand felt clammy against mine. "Stop."

A VOICE was calling, softly, not ten paces from where we crouched, shielded by the blackness.

"Red! Say, Red! Red, do you hear me?"

Silence, in which my heart thumped loud. Then a stirring within the hut, a sleepy grumbling, followed by a yawn.

"Red!"

More stirrings and yawns, then—muffled. "Who's there?"

"Sssh, it's me; Spike. I want to talk to ya."

Straining our ears, we heard a huge form lumber to its feet, move about.

"'S a hell of a note. Can't ya let a fella sleep? Whatya want?"

"Listen, Red." Both figures were invisible, but we could hear plainly enough. "It's the girl. The Chief's keeping her fer hisself."

"What about it?" growled the other.

"'Tain't fair. Me 'n you's as good as him. Let's cut in."

"Not fer me." Red was wide awake now. "He'd chop us down sure as shootin'."

"Naw he wouldn'. If he kicks, we'd get 'im first. Then we cud keep all the swag fer ourselves."

"No go," said Red positively. We would hear him shift his position, as though he had turned to re-enter the air generator building. "You're all hopped up, Spike. Go ta bed an' sleep it off."

"Ya damned yellabelly," Spike gritted. "I gave ya a chance; now take this."

We could hear a swish in the silence; a groan, a dull thud—and more silence!

"Now," I whispered, and started to run. But Gerry was already on his way. We dashed pellmell through the thick soft dark, heedless of obstacles, of anything except that we had to get there in time.

I crashed headlong into a wall. A terrified scream slashed through the night. Spike had found his prey. Heedless of gashed forehead, I whirled, slithered along the wall with groping fingers, trying to find the entrance. But Gerry beat me to it. His pounding feet had carried him straight. A whirlwind swept into the hovel, smacked squarely into invisible, struggling figures.

A startled oath ripped out, a grunt, and the crash of shots. By the time I was inside it was all over.

I saw the picture outlined in sharp shadows in the midst of weird machinery. I saw the gun Gerry held in one free hand. He'd snatched it from Red's body. The other arm enclosed protectively the slim form of Marion. On the ground, outstretched, groaning feebly, was Spike. Ugru peered in fearfully from the doorway, an unhuman note in the strange scene.

"Quick, we've got to get to Petrie," I snapped. "That shot must have wakened the whole place."

"Wait here, darling," Gerry whispered to Marion.

"No." Her voice was low, but firm. "I'm going too."

"All right, all right," I cried impatiently. "If we don't hurry, we'll have no place to go." There's no sense in arguing with a woman.

We catapulted out of the building, Gerry leading the way with his flash. There was no sense in further concealment; Petrie must be awake and waiting.

But to our surprise, the darkness held thick and palpable; silence brooded with invisible wings. Not a sound, not a glimmer of light to show that anyone was stirring.

FOR the first time I felt afraid. The silence was ominous, frightening. Garlon Petrie had shown himself too clever, too resourceful, to be caught napping like any dull-witted fool. I did not like it. But we could not hold back now. The last desperate chance must be taken.

CHAPTER V

A Race Against Death

IT WAS a strange race through an inky smudge relieved only by the wavering flash ahead. Soft slitherings grew upon my straining ears; the pad of hundreds of webbed feet. I could not see them, but I knew the Keras were gathering. Every so often the thin flare caught a startled figure that weaved quickly back into the sheltering darkness. And ahead, invisible, silent, ominous, was the building in which Petrie and his scum were gathered. A strange race to the death in this strange underground world!

Gerry flicked the torch off. I could hear Marion's soft panting alongside of me. The blackness was even more intense for the loss of light.

Ugru whispered. "Emperor's place he right ahead."

We were in the midst of a sway of invisible figures, pushing, hissing eagerly, softly. The Keras!

"What do now?" Ugru was manifestly perplexed.

"I'm going first," said Gerry quietly. "When I shout have your people rush the place."

"No," Marion panted.

"I'm with you," I stated. It was suicide, but I couldn't let him down. A hand found mine somehow, and squeezed. I felt better then.

"Come on." We started forward, shouldering our way through the press.

A shriek of agony split the night, stopped us flat-footed. Gerry flashed his beam instantly, and swore. A Kera, more daring than the rest, had crept to the curved wall of the building, had touched it. He was down on the ground, writhing in awful pain. Petrie had wired the walls, and the juice was on.

Almost immediately the whole of that underground world dazzled into the glow of day. Sharp spitting explosions came to our stunned ears, followed by the terrible clatter of gigantic typewriters.

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"Machine guns!" I gasped, and threw myself flat, pulling the others down with me. Even in my despair I could not refrain from admiration. Petrie had been prepared, waiting.

A storm of bullets swept the open ground, cut through the bewildered, milling Keras like great scythes. The poor underocean creatures broke under the frightful hail. The great clay plain was dotted with madly running fish-men, leaving a score behind who never would run again.

The firing ceased. Petrie appeared in the doorway, a smoking automatic in each hand. His sallow cheeks were aflame, his smoldering eyes scorched in their intensity.

"The slaves thought to catch me napping, did they?" his chuckle rasped. "That's a lesson they soon won't forget."

Gerry cursed and tried to rise.

I pulled him back forcibly. "You fool," I whispered sharply. "You'll be cut in two before you go a yard. Our only chance is playing dead, and trying for the sub later."

But it was too late. Petrie's sharp eyes had seen the movement. "Come out of there," he said levelling his guns.

"Now we'll have to run for it," I groaned. "Come on."

Four figures rose like ghosts from the bloody ground and ran, head down, scattering, away from the building. Ugru had stuck with us.

Petrie's guns flamed, but our sudden move had upset his aim. We were making good time when the gunmen inside opened up with everything they had. Death belched and whistled all about us. A high-powered bullet ripped through my thigh, another thudded in my shoulder. I staggered, and kept on. I could see a gash across Gerry's scalp. Marion was pale but unhurt. Ugru was in the van, leading us steadily through that hell toward the submarine.

A SUDDEN lull in the firing behind us, a shout. I looked back, saw Petrie and his men piling after us. They had sensed what we were about.

We put on an extra burst of speed. There was about three hundred yards between us now. The great rocky ceiling was curving low overhead. We were nearing the confines of the little world. Bullets began to zip around us, but the range was too great for accurate shooting. My eyes darted vainly along the sloping rock wall, seeking for some sign of an opening. There was none. Was Ugru leading us into a trap, I wondered? My perspiring hands clenched grimly as I ran. If he was . . .

But the fish-man padded unhesitatingly in front, straight for a smoother seeming section of rock. His webbed fingers slid along the edge where it joined the plain, fumbled in search. Behind came the gunmen, a compact little group, Petrie well in advance. They fired as they ran. Little spurts of clay kicked up around our feet, the rock chipped into flying fragments. I could hear the whine of the missiles as they hissed past my ear. Only two hundred yards separated us now.

Yet Ugru still fumbled, at a loss. I looked wildly about for some weapon, anything to defend ourselves. There was nothing, not even a pebble. Gerry had faced around grimly, crouching as if ready to spring upon the advancing men with bare hands. Marion stood erect and white.

There was a shout of triumph from the gunmen as they saw our predicament. Petrie raised his gun and fired. Gerry staggered from a bullet in his shoulder. Only a hundred yards now.

"We're through," said Gerry quietly. "Afraid, darling?"

"No," she answered bravely. "Better this than remain in Petrie's hands."

I wasn't quite that noble. I didn't want to die! I whirled around to curse out Ugru, just as he hissed exultant syllables in his own tongue. A section of smooth rock was sliding into a hidden recess.

"It's open," I yelled insanely. The four of us tumbled through in a confused heap; the section slid to behind us just as some highly indignant gunmen let loose another fusillade. I felt the impact of a slug somewhere, but what was one more or less when I was already so well filled with lead.

We were in a roughly hollowed chamber, almost completely filled with a gigantic metal fish. The *Sea Squid!*

Gerry's eyes flamed at the sight of it. "I never thought to see here again," he exulted.

"And you won't see her much longer if you don't do something quick," I told him in disgust.

I could hear muffled thumpings from the other side of our rocky prison. It would take Petrie only a minute to find the trick slide.

Gerry snapped into command. "Kemp, you take Marion into the sub through that open ejector tube. Ugru, you let the waters in, quick. I'll try and hold them off a while."

Marion started to protest, but I didn't give her a chance. I picked her up bodily and forced her, struggling, through the tube compartment into the interior of the sub. Then I went back to the mouth of the tube, hand on the wheel, ready to lock it fast if Gerry had to dive through in a hurry.

THE water was already pouring into the rock chamber; tumbling and splashing. The floor was covered with icy cold waves to the depth of a foot and rising visibly. Ugru was nowhere in sight. But Gerry was fighting for his life.

The entrance to the cavern lock was open. Someone, it may have been Petrie, was dashing through with smoking gun. Gerry, hidden to one side, stepped forward, clubbed him with his now empty gun. The man went down like a poled ox into the welter of waters. Already they were pouring through the opening, spreading into the underground world.

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I yelled to him to come on, but he couldn't. For the other gunmen had piled through and were on top of him. It was a twisting, squirming, heaving mass. They could not use their weapons at such close quarters without killing their own men.

The water was not raising any further. As fast as it came in, it ran out through the entrance into the hollow world. In despair, I started out from the ejector tube in a hopeless attempt to help Gerry, when a noise like ten thousand Niagaras stopped me short. I shot one swift glance around, and jumped back into the ejector tube, just in time.

A solid wall of water darted down the cavern, picked up the powerful submarine, tossed it dizzily about like a tiny chip. I caught a last glimpse of those struggling figures buried beneath mountains of water, and then it was swirling into the tube until I was waist deep. Inside the sub, on the other side of the inner lock, which luckily I had had sense enough to close, I heard Marion's scream.

My dulled mind held fixedly to one thought. I must get Gerry somehow. Foolish, insane, of course. Gerry was dead, crushed under that welter of waters; I would be dead soon too. Already the flood was waist deep and coming up fast. But I was beyond coherent thought, I struggled against its almost irresistible onrush, trying to dive out of the tube.

I was still struggling vainly when I saw something moving in the pea-green depths. A dark, slender form shot toward me with the grace of a fish, seemingly attached to another and inert mass. A webbed hand reached out, caught me just as my lungs were filling with water, pushed me back into the tube.

My head bobbed above the surface, gasping. Ugru's wet skin shone sleekly as he supported Gerry's lolling head above the waters.

"Close door," he hissed. I coughed up some gallons of water, grasped at the valve. Luckily it was close by. It creaked protestingly, but it worked. The slide closed upon the incoming waters. Ugru supported us both to the other end. A twist at the inner valve, and we were tumbled into the sub with a rush of water. Marion closed it quickly behind us and caught at Gerry with tight, possessive arms.

SOME half hour later, the *Sea Squid* was resting quietly on the ocean bottom outside the submerged world of the Keras. Gerry was himself again, after a fashion. All our wounds were dressed, and the water drained from our lungs.

Gerry grasped the fish-man's hand. "Thanks," he said warmly, "you saved all our lives with your quick wit."

Ugru grinned. "Let all water in at once. Drown them. Catch you and pull you in."

"But what are you going to do now? Your world is ocean now; all your people killed! Come with us."

The fish-man shook his head. "No. Me stay here. Kera not dead. Only swim around. Petrie, he, others, dead. No breathe water. Me go back. Know how empty. Live again peace." He tapped his breast proudly. "Me Emperor again."

"And a damned good Emperor too," I responded cordially.

It was with real regret that we finally let him out through the tube, watched his graceful form darting fish-like through the blackness of ocean's depths in the visor-screens, saw him wave a webbed hand as he vanished into the drowned lock that led into his underground world.

Then we headed upward, back to our own world of sun and air and sky.

"You know," I said, as the engines throbbed their steady beat, "there's only one thing that worries me."

"What is that?" Marion asked.

"I hate to leave that ten million cooling itself down there."

Gerry looked at me queerly. "It isn't," he said. "It's all packed snugly in the sub's hold. Petrie was preparing to take it up and market it."

Moby, too (continued from page 61

night. My only chance was to fly to Earth immediately and wreck the plot. I did—and the Observatory too. It was the surest way to blast the bacteria out of existence. I had to beat the moonrise . . . and I made it."

"I remember," Chris murmured. "But tell me, why did you bring Dot and me back here and allow us freedom? Knowing Dorothy was the crook she was, why didn't you wipe her out—"

"I kidnapped her from earth to stop her doing any more harm. I was too late to stop her phoning her New York agent; that had to take its chance. I felt somehow that you'd come through, and because I wanted you to follow us I wrote 'Ultra' on the mirror as a clue. . . ."

"Why did you want me to follow?"

"To find out for yourself about Dorothy. I knew no words of mine would ever convince you. She reacted as I had anticipated and gave the signal to the hide-out. . . . Naturally I was always near at hand. I overheard the plan to throw you down the shaft and was ready and waiting."

There was a long silence. The girl turned at last toward the jungle. Chris followed her thoughtfully.

"You are sure the only reason you left the clue for me to follow you was because of Dorothy?"

Violet Ray stopped, her eyes averted. "It was as good a reason as any," she murmured. "Better follow me; I'll return you to earth safely."

"But I don't want to go back to Earth. I've nothing to go for! And besides, some of the things that have happened have made me want to go on and on —to try and find the source of all the trouble that clutters up the system with piracy, crime, and threats of death."

The girl smiled faintly. "I do get lonely sometimes," she admitted, almost naively. "And there are so many things I have yet to do—things no ordinary woman could do. A partner would be useful perhaps. . . ."

Chris seized her slim, strong hand. "I'm not going back to Earth—yet . . ." he said.

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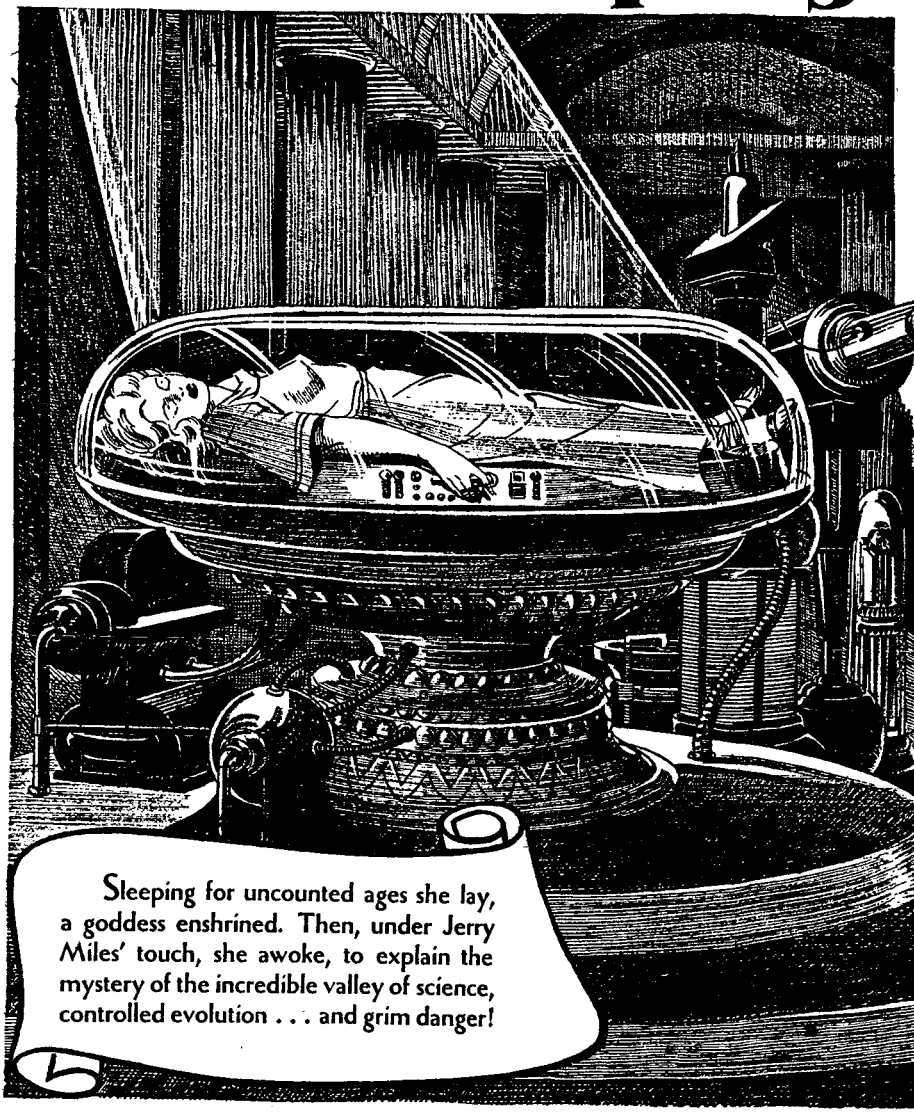
The Sleeping



Sleeping for uncounted ages she lay, a goddess enshrined. Then, under Jerry Miles' touch, she awoke, to explain the mystery of the incredible valley of science, controlled evolution . . . and grim danger!

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Goddess

By MAURICE DUCLOS

CHAPTER I
The Glass Wall

"BLAZES!" muttered Jerry Miles. He rumpled his flaxen hair in perplexity. "Wish old Prof. Higgins back at U.S.C. could see this."

Jerry was gazing amazedly at such a scene as he had never before seen, and that it should be in the desert wastes of northern Afghanistan was equally as incredible.

Several hundred feet away were a number of squat buildings. Composed of a substance that might have been an opaque glass, they looked as if they had been molded in a gigantic die-cast. But these structures were mere details, for beyond towered an object that dwarfed all other buildings into puny insignificance.

It was a wall, a stupendous barrier that rose sheer, unguessable hundreds of feet heavenward, curving from sight on either side in the distance. More amazing yet was the fact that it was transparent! A titanic bulwark that might have been composed of a single piece of the finest crown glass!

He strode to it, and it loomed above huge as a mountain of quartz. For what curious purpose had it been built? It seemed sunk firmly in the earth, and rose sheer without a break to a terrible height.

Eagerness mounted in him as he saw a group of levers near a circular door. But they were jammed, and his mightiest efforts would not budge them.

Then he saw the ladder. A series of rungs, it was, projecting from the wall and extending up out of sight. They seemed molded as part of the wall itself firm and apparently safe.

In an instant Jerry was decided.

He started up the ladder. Keen anticipation fired him, and he worked vigorously at the task of climbing. Soon, however, he began to tire. Only then did he realize the seriousness of the task he had allotted himself. One little fumble or slip. . . .

Below, the little group of buildings contracted as they sank lower and lower. He could look over an immense distance, across the shimmering desert like a sea of silver. He had the horrible impression of being suspended free in space.

Finally, toward noon, his flagging muscles carried him slowly over the brink of the barrier and onto the top. He stumbled exhausted to its surface and lay for a while reveling in the feel of a solid mass beneath him. Then he raised his head.

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THE top of the wall was perhaps fifty feet in width, apparently the same thickness as the base. It was as smooth and level as a dance floor, curving away in either direction like a modern highway. Directly across from him were the top rails of a ladder leading down the inner side.

Jerry rose stiffly to his feet, gave a wry glance behind him at the desert. The whole arid plain was visible, curving up to the surrounding mountains like a vast saucer. The height was terrific; three or four thousand feet, and the sense of it caught in his stomach like a nauseous weight. He turned away, approached the inner side of the barrier with quickening interest. An utterly strange, unearthly scene lay spread beneath him.

Weird jungle seemed to cover the land below. Jumbles of green, banks of livid crimson lining the lake, and here and there spots of yellow. Grotesque plants, possibly, vegetation bizarre and alien in appearance.

Stranger still was the atmosphere that filled the basin. Jerry grunted his amazement. A deep blue-green, almost of curdling consistency, it seemed, that covered the scene to within a few feet of the wall's top like a sea of water. Faint purple clouds floated within.

For a while Miles gazed at this landscape of weird beauty spread beneath him, wondering and speculating at all its mysteries. Then his eyes caught a steady unhurried movement over the masses of green; something rising upward. He saw that it was a giant brilliantly argent globe ascending through the blue gas. Wonder gripped him as he realized that it was a bubble, formed somehow on the plain of luxuriant vegetation below. As it rose nearer he saw that its diameter was perhaps ten feet, that it was moving quite fast. Then with a ripple it burst through the surface of gas and vanished into nothingness.

Jerry's gaze went back to the broad land beneath. Quickly he saw another moving sphere in the distance. Then two more at one side, and as he gazed intently he discovered more, dozens, hundreds of them scattered all over the basin floor in little clusters. They were motionless, but one here and there broke loose to glide to the surface—like bubbles in a fermenting liquid, he thought.

For a long time Miles gazed in rapt wonder at the jungle. He deliberated a little on venturing down, but there was a thick unwholesomeness about the gas filling the basin he didn't like. Then, too, the prospect of an added descent and climb was not pleasing.

But his curiosity overcame his inertia, and soon Miles found himself making the long ladder descent into the strange valley below. About him flowed the blue-green gas, tumbling and billowing upward like the slow moving figments of a dream. Warm, it was, laden with sweet heavy fragrance from nameless jungle growths. It exerted a physical pressure almost like a liquid, but aside from a few retching gasps, it seemed not to affect him.

With a tinge of elation, he soon reached bottom. Spheres were all about, ranging from marble-size to giant ten foot globes that dotted the landscape with silver profusion. As he had suspected, they grew over clumps of vegetation, a large bubble here and there swaying gently till it broke from its insecure mooring to float up out of sight. Other spheres were in profusion, too, ones he had not seen before. They were larger than the bubbles, twenty to thirty feet, and hung suspended, balloon-like, a score of yards above the ground from tawny cables. Their green color had made them invisible from above, but now they stood out sharply, substantial enigmatical objects.

He cast a wary glance about. He could see the basin's massive wall curving to obscurity on either side far in the distance. Visibility was poor, and he realized also that the riotous foliage would offer convenient hiding places for dangerous animals. He hitched the gun holster to a more accessible position on his hip, then stepped forward onto the yielding moss carpet.

CHAPTER II

Neena

HARDLY had he taken a dozen steps than a faint rustling from a tangled bank of green before him drew his attention. He whipped out his gun, and then his muscles went limp in utter surprise.

For there stood a woman!

Jerry gasped his amazement. Nothing could have been more startlingly incongruous than a woman in this bizarre jungle. That the woman was of breath-taking loveliness only increased his surprise.

Her body was like a sleek pale-bronze flame of perilous beauty. A slender body curved and rounded, half clothed, half revealed by a silken tight-fitting robe of yellow. Her hair, Miles could see, fell about her shoulders like tumbling black tresses spun from the essence of cosmic space. Her eyes also were jet, her face oval, exotic, red lips curved in a smile as she stood gazing at him.

Then with graceful, almost feline movements she strode toward Jerry, halted before him. His throat felt choked, dry. Chaotic emotions pulsed through him at her nearness. She spoke, her voice soft, throaty, and again he started. For she used a foot-form of the ancient Semitic tongue of which Aramic and Phoenician languages were representatives. Her meaning, if not her words, were clear.

She repeated them.

"Welcome to Iroq, Lord Zendfap. We await your bidding." Then, as Miles stood in silent confusion, she went on, a puzzled frown wrinkling her brow. "You are silent. Something displeases you? I, Neena, High Priestess of Iroq, have come alone to welcome you; that is as it should be. Perhaps it is I then, in whom you find disfavor?"

She stood close before Miles, the dark pools of her eyes looking deep into his, the heady fragrance of her

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hair thick in his nostrils. She was like a pulse-quickening vision of Astarte come to life. Yet there was something in the dark depths of her eyes that sent a little tug of doubt through him. It was a cold calculating something that seemed not so much a conscious quality as it was inborn. Yet Jerry's senses pounded at the nearness of the woman. Slowly a smile once again parted those crimson lips. She had seen the undisguised admiration on his face.

Miles struggled for words, his tongue fumbling the unfamiliar syllables. "No one—god—or mortal, could find fault with such as you. It is merely that your words confuse me. I am not Lord Zendfap—whoever he might be."

The woman's laugh was like the sonorous mellow notes of a bell. She let her eyes pass over him, his strong square-cut face, his tall muscular body.

"Lord Zendfap jests," she said appreciatively. "Who else could come from the nether land beyond the Wall? Indeed, who else could breathe the evil air? And you are different, much different from the men of Iroq. . . ."

Her eyes glowed deeply as she appraised him anew.

Quick interest stirred in Jerry Was it possible that people had lived in this strange thick atmosphere so long that normal air was injurious to them?

"The air up there"—he gestured up at the misty dimness of the cyclopean wall—"is poison to your people?"

The black eyes widened with surprise. "Not poison. It isn't enough—to breathe. Surely Lord Zendfap knows that! But come. The people of Iroq await you."

SHE was at his side, crooking a warm bare arm through his. She faced the weird forest then, and uttered a clear, shrill call. Immediately from somewhere ahead came a dull *thud, thud, thud* as of huge thumping feet, and the sound of bodies smashing through fleshy growths.

Unconsciously Miles tensed himself, set his jaw grimly. There was an alien unnatural note to that sound he didn't like. But the next moment his muscles sagged in complete surprise. For, pushing between a tangle of yellow vegetation was a thing so strange, so utterly at variance to any surrounding that he could do nothing but stare.

A lustrous red machine was coming toward them. But a machine that stood on four jointed legs projecting outward spider fashion. Eight feet tall it was, its body a stubby upright cylindrical section from which three pliable tapering tentacles dangled. Surmounting its body was a "head," a ruddy metal globe four feet in diameter, completely smooth except for three lens-tubes protruding outward and spaced triangularly, close together.

The thing thudded forward on metal feet, and its lens seemed to glow with sentient consciousness. The hair on Miles' neck stiffened. He dropped his hand to his holster.

Neena saw the movement and must have sensed something of Jerry's perplexity. She laughed gaily.

"It is only one of my servants. I left them to wait beyond the foliage. They will take us into Iroq."

Miles saw that two more of the robots, identical to the first, were striding up. Dangling from two outward held tentacles of the third was a canopied litter, elaborately embellished and inscribed with strange characters. As the metal thing halted near by, Jerry became conscious of a soft whirring noise issuing from each, like the mechanical rhythm of turning shafts and gears.

A slim golden arm was tugging at Jerry's sleeve. "Come," said the woman's throaty voice. "Your sedan chair, Lord Zendfap." She gestured, urged him towards the richly bedecked seat dangling from the robot's appendages. Dazedly he seated himself, noticing absently that the tentacles did not sag in the least under his weight.

Desperately he tried to shake off the aura of strangeness and unreality that held him. Certainly this was no dream or hallucination, this incredible world in which he found himself. This fantastic transparent wall cupping a strange thick atmosphere and bizarre jungle. And then the woman herself—Neena, High Priestess of Iroq, she had called herself. Where did she fit in? Certainly her kind had not built the wall, for her few words had shown her to believe in a "nether land" beyond, and in a pagan god "Zendfap."

Miles smiled faintly. The thought of duplicity did not please him, but neither could he turn from something that promised novel adventure. He couldn't help it if she insisted he was that god Zendfap!

NEENA was seating herself gracefully in the canopied palanquin next to him. She uttered a sharp command and the contrivance jolted into life, stalked forward with a steady mechanical stride that sent the litter swaying like a birdcage in the grasp of a running man. The other two automatons followed at either side and a little behind. Lithely the woman leaned toward Jerry.

"Long ages have my people kept sentries to watch for your coming. Today their vigil ended when they saw you ascend the Wall. Your quarters at the Palace are in readiness."

She called another command and their strange steed plunged forward more swiftly.

The green balloons that he had discovered on emerging from the "elevator," proved to be plants. Huge thirty foot spheres of vegetative tissue apparently filled with sustaining gas and growing to the ground by cable-stalks. At the juncture where these stems entered earth they were provided with thorns, cruel spear-sized spines radiating outward like the closely spaced spokes of a huge wheel; a natural *cheval-de-frise* that would certainly protect the stalk.

Miles felt a desire to question Neena about these odd plants, but something deep within him cautioned, warned him peremptorily not to show too great an ig-

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norance. Zendfap would be expected to know all about his land. And Jerry remembered, too, that cold something that lurked in the depths of the woman's eyes. What would happen if she were to be convinced he was not a deity? No telling what power she wielded in this fantastic place. . . .

The robots were carrying them swiftly over the mossy ground. They mounted the crest of a gentle swell and for a moment Jerry could peer above the massed vegetation. His eyes were caught by a slender white tower thrusting up dimly in the distant thick atmosphere. Neena gave a quick nod at it.

"Yonder is the Temple of the Gods. You shall dwell there after your wedding day."

Jerry coughed, choked back his surprise. "My wedding day?" he managed in a voice that didn't ring with the nonchalance intended.

"Truly," replied Neena, black eyes studying him enigmatically. "What other reason would bring Zendfap among the mortals of Iroq?"

"What other indeed?" responded Miles, and determined mentally to learn more about the god Zendfap at his first opportunity.

PRESENTLY their ruddy steed carried them to a wide trail cleared of the carpeting moss. It cut straight over the low hillocks toward the white spire visible now, looming larger each second above the clustered brilliant vegetation. Finally the path widened into a well-defined road, and here and there appeared low stone houses, crude of construction. People lined the way; not a shouting waving throng, but a silent curious one. He saw that they were a thick-set, swarthy folk; on the whole the crowd displayed dull-witted impassiveness.

The woman at Jerry's side sat stiffly, regally in the chair as they passed down the thickening aisle of people.

They were in a village now, all the houses and buildings constructed uniformly and unskillfully from dark stone; certainly not the handiwork of the people who had built the great wall. . . .

Directly down the road, and looming above all, was that slender tower of white. The beauty of its unearthly architecture caught in Jerry's throat. He gestured at it.

"It is old, the Temple of the Gods?" He tried to keep the querying inflection from his voice, but Neena glanced up quickly, eyed him quizzically.

"None should know better than you, my Lord. It has been here since the beginning, even before the first mortal touched foot on Iroq's soil. It is—Temple of the Gods."

The thronged people stood away respectfully from about the white building, nor did they follow as the robot carrying Miles and Neena plodded mechanically to the temple and halted before a low white porch. With lithe grace the woman sprang from the litter. She turned to face Miles and he read a baffling challenge, a malicious eagerness in her eyes.

"Come," sounded her mellow voice, "I know you are anxious to see the Sleeping Goddess. . . ."

Obeying in silent wonder, Jerry stepped from the swinging litter and followed at the girl's side into a long cool corridor with slender flanking pilasters alternately fluted and twisted. Then up a spidery curving stairway to a magnificent circular room, steeply vaulted.

CHAPTER III

Sleeping Goddess

THE circular room itself was strikingly bare except for the highly carved and ornamented walls. The floor was a glistening black expanse like a polished obsidian dance floor. In the center was a dais upon which rested a golden metal object perhaps seven feet in length. Oblong, it was, and reminded Miles strongly of a coffin.

Neena's slim arm was in his, drawing him to it.

"See," she whispered throatily, "the Sleeping Goddess!"

Jerry stared through the curved transparent covering of the golden box, and his eyes were caught by the vision within.

She lay stretched there as if in death, a young woman of pale cameo-like beauty. Hair lustrous golden as the coffin that held her, coiled spirals of it falling about the pure whiteness of an aristocratic face. Fine matchless beauty was there, more enhanced by the slender curves of her body showing beneath the silken whiteness of a simple gown. Her tiny feet were shod in classical sandals.

Jerry could not repress an intake of breath. Here was real beauty, understandable womanly loveliness, nothing of the perilous beauty of Neena.

Something else within the golden coffin caught his eye. The girl's right arm lay at her side and close to her relaxed hand was a group of small silver levers projecting from the plush-lined wall. Strange dials and meters were there too. Some faint suspicion of the truth sent the blood pounding eagerly through Jerry's veins. The *Sleeping Goddess:* could it be that . . . ?

Neena's black eyes were upon him, her carmine lips twisted in an oblique smile. Obviously some response was expected of him.

He nodded down at the beautiful reposed figure. "When," he said boldly, deliberately, "will the Sleeping Goddess awaken?"

Quick surprise flooded her face to be instantly masked by an expressionless stare. "I would not presume to know," she replied. "*That* is for my Lord to decide!" And she bowed extravagantly to Miles.

He cursed under his breath. Every verbal tilt so far had gone to this sleek dark beauty at his side. It seemed nothing could escape the flashing intuitive stare of those eyes—and that sinister something in their depths was growing. Soon, very soon, perhaps, a crisis would be reached and something told him it

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would not be pleasant.

Jerry let his eyes feast once again on the beauty of the golden-haired girl beneath the transparent lid. Here certainly was the crux of the whole baffling adventure, the key that would explain, that would fit each mystery into a completed whole with kaleidoscopic precision. But, and Miles felt a tug of hopelessness, it required at least rudimentary knowledge to use the key. He lacked even that!

Neena was near at hand, her honeyed tones soft. "Always has the Sleeping Goddess rested here. And once, when Iroq was young she awoke, came among our people and blessed them. But that was long ages ago, Lord Zendfap, and then one morning she had returned to her bed of sleep." A faint malicious glitter appeared in the jet eyes. "She awaits only your touch to rise again!"

Jerry hid a sudden quickening of interest. Neena's words were probably barbaric legend, yet it tied in with a growing suspicion of his. Those levers and dials within the golden casket were not mere decorations. Vital scientific reason must be behind it all. But he could not investigate with the cold eyes of Neena watching him.

He wheeled abruptly, faced the woman squarely.

"Priestess," he said, "I will awaken the Sleeping Goddess so that she may walk once again among the people of Iroq. But the time has not yet come. Right now I tire, and would taste of your earthly food."

The ebon head bowed in assent, and Jerry could not see her face as she answered: "Your desire is my command."

She turned with him and glided lithely across the black crystal floor toward the stairs. Her slim yellow-cased figure was close to Miles, the Stygian torrents of her hair tumbling about her shoulders, the perilous mystery of her enveloping him like the heady fragrance of perfume. Worlds different she was, from that still golden-crowned beauty back there.

DUSK was in the thick atmosphere when Neena and Jerry emerged from the white temple. Three grotesque metal robots stood stiffly in their former positions, and further beyond at a respectful distance from the tower waited the stocky people of Iroq.

The woman waved a slim bronzed arm at the canopied seat. "Come; my servants will carry us to the Palace."

She was beside him in the litter then, and a spoken word to the automaton brought it to life. Its jointed metal legs moved and it clumped rapidly into the street, the throng making way for it. As before, the robot retinue escorted them.

Darkness was settling fast within the hazy confines of the great wall, seemingly to pour in like ink into a tumbler of water. But the stomping robots did not slacken their stride; some uncanny sense seemed to guide them unerringly. The swaying of the seat threw Neena close against him. His heart leaped. Her exotic oval face shown palely through the darkness, turned up to his.

"The best of Iroq is yours," she whispered. "May your stay at the Palace be pleasing; you are my guest, I High Priestess of Iroq!"

Swiftly the ruddy machine carried the swaying litter along a paved path between alternate banks of vegetation. Miles glanced about him in silent confusion. The coming of evening had only increased the unreality, the dream-like quality of everything. He turned almost desperately to gaze at the girl beside him in the chair. Her face was calm, undisturbed, eyes looking ahead at a squat building looming directly before them.

At a command from Neena the robots had slowed their pace, then they were clattering through a passage illuminated ineffectually by occasional smoking torches. Another word from the girl halted the machines beside stone steps leading upward. A short hallway was on the second floor, and Neena drew him toward a large bronze door. It swung open at her touch, revealing a wide square room.

Standing within the doorway were four men. Stocky, powerful, dark as were all the men of Iroq. The very similarity of three, cast them as nondescript individuals. Plainly attired they were, in livid-red robes and sandals. Their dark features were thick, coarse, reflecting brute dullness.

The fourth man differed only in his clothes and the stamp of his face. A silken purple garment was draped imperiously over his broad shoulders, and beneath it flared loose trousers of the same hue. Sullen harshness was visible on his swarthy face, reflected in the thick hawk-nose, the twist of the wide lips. And a brutish sense of power was there, too, lurking in the crafty depths of his eyes. Here was a force in the destinies of Iroq.

He bowed low, and the three red-robes beside him followed suit.

Neena's throaty voice sounded: "This is Borko, my Chief Administrator, and his deputies."

The man stepped back from the doorway, flung out his arm in gesture. "This is your dwelling place, Lord Zendfap," he said in a thick voice. "Never has it been occupied; endlessly have we kept the torches burning in hope that some day you would come . . . we are honored, and pleased!"

But as Miles entered the room, Neena's arm in his, he saw that Borko was far from pleased. Jealous hatred blazed in the man's eyes.

Revealed in the flaring light of cressets, the chamber was barbarously resplendent with furnishings and trappings. Pelt rugs littered the floor, strange skins that Jerry could not classify. Blue and orange fresco work decorated the walls, and at one side was a waist-high block of stone, the top hollowed to form a basin. Flanking it were two huge urns of water.

Neena gave a graceful bow of her head, excused herself, and walked to the door. She turned then, looked back at Miles. Like a pale-bronze medallion she stood, the flaring light playing over the yellow

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of her gown. And in the mirroring pools of her eyes was a mocking challenge, an enigmatic promise of caprice that sent Jerry's blood thumping through his veins.

Then she was gone.

BUT that glance had not escaped the beady eyes of Borko. Ill-concealed rage flooded his hawk-nosed face, and Miles knew that here was an implacable enemy, one that would cause trouble sooner or later.

A moment he stood in front of Jerry, eyeing him boldly.

"The clothes of Lord Zendfap are strange," he growled. "I have always thought they would be robes of the priesthood . . ."

"Indeed?" snapped Miles. "Are you one to judge?"

A shadow of fear passed over the swarthy face. "Your pardon, Lord Zendfap," he murmured. Then, hurriedly: "I will have food served."

Deliberately Jerry turned his back upon the four men, strode across the room to a huge window—and he could almost feel the hate-filled eyes of Borko piercing his back. Somehow the Chief Administrator had guessed that he was not a divinity!

Sound of the opening door behind him wheeled Miles about. Five servants were entering the room, bearing silver platters crowded with food. Silently they placed the trays upon short cradling tripods near a banked pile of cushions. Then, at a gesture from Borko they retired.

"Food, Lord Zendfap," said the purple-garbed Administrator with a humbleness that did not deceive Jerry.

When Miles had seated himself cross legged upon a pillow before one of the trays, the four officials took positions opposite him. He did full justice to the meal. There were odd-flavored cooked vegetables, a variety of strange fruit and nuts, and tender meat.

Borko's eyes were on him, again growing insolently belligerent in their scrutiny.

"Lord Zendfap finds *earthly* food pleasing?" He leered mockingly.

Jerry caught the implication. He realized that Borko, becoming ever more certain that he was not immortal, would soon make trouble. The only way to check such an occurrence was to overawe, bluff.

"It amuses me to taste your crude offerings," he retorted imperiously.

Brief anger flared in the obsidian eyes. "But you *do* eat food like a common mortal," growled Borko boldly. "You look like a mortal . . ."

"Watch your tongue!" snapped Miles threateningly. "Displease me, Administrator, and I may destroy you with thundering death!"

The three red-garbed deputies, Jerry could see, were afraid. The swarthiness of their faces had changed to an apprehensive white. But Borko was unconvinced, had lost all caution.

"Your words are mighty," he grunted. "But words are useless; what proof have you that you are in truth Lord Zendfap?"

"Proof that will crush you if you anger me further!" growled Jerry. He jerked out his pistol, leveled it quickly at one of the water urns across the room. Three shots crashing on the heels of one another smashed the earthenware crock to pieces. Water splattered on the floor.

The three deputies reached the door in a single concerted rush, struggled through, hoarse wails of fear on their lips. Borko retained his position with obvious difficulty. His mouth was open, his thick harsh features distorted with baffled surprise.

Quickly he bowed his head to Miles, mumbled an apology.

Jerry pointed at the door. "Go!" he thundered, "before I lose patience!"

Borko obeyed with alacrity.

And Miles, watching the powerful purple-clothed figure leave, knew that the man had not been convinced one iota of his divinity.

CHAPTER IV

Puppets of Evolution

JERRY did not wait for further developments. Now, if ever, was the time to visit the white temple and the golden Sleeping Goddess. Key to the whole mystery was there; all he had to do was find it. In any event, a secret foray could do no harm.

He crossed to the rectangle window, crawled over the wide sill, and let himself down by his arms. He dropped lightly upon the roof of the first story, then repeated the performance from the roof, landed on thick carpeting moss. All was quiet in the dusk shrouded courtyard.

Obviously there were no guards about, nor was there need for them. Jerry strode freely along curving paths among the banked foliage until he came to the low arching gate. He halted momentarily, peered into the darkened street. It was deserted. Even if he did chance upon someone he would attract no untoward attention in the darkness.

He made the trip to the Temple of the Gods quickly and uneventfully. Its slender white tower shimmered faintly in the moonlight, guiding him like a beacon.

Quickly he mounted the graceful curving staircase to the silent splendor of the rotunda above. As he strode to the golden coffin he was startled to see light flooding from the interior through the transparent lid.

Jerry leaned forward. The illumination, he saw, came from a cleverly concealed indirect lighting tube circling the coffin where the lid and plush-lined interior met. And the warm glow played over the still form of the Sleeping Goddess.

Her pale beauty seemed scarcely earthly now, with the light rippling on the golden cascades of her hair, etching in faint strokes of shadow the long lashes and the closed lids. Full sensitive mouth was deep pink.

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Here was a vibrant loveliness strangely piquant. But as she lay there Miles wondered if indeed she had ever risen from the "sleep."

He looked again at the levers and dials on the casket wall. They were well within reach of the girl's hand. But there seemed no way of discovering their purpose; there were no duplicating levers on the outside. . . . Sudden inspiration made him examine the thick carvings on the coffin's exterior directly opposite the inside levers Almost immediately he perceived a fine circle in the gold; like the flush end of a small shaft, it appeared. And in this circle was a shallow square hole plainly at variance to the sweeping curves of the other engravings. It seemed to him that a lever was meant to fit in that hole.

Jerry substituted the handle of his bowie knife, forcing the squared end into the hole. Then he twisted upon the blade.

His heart thumped. The circle was turning slowly! He bent low over the coffin, saw that a single inside lever was also moving; it then, was connected to the golden shaft he was twisting. Abruptly sounded the click of a moving tumbler. The shaft would budge no further. Soft whirring of hidden machinery issued from somewhere beneath the coffin, the hiss of gas under pressure. And then Miles jerked erect with a low gasp on his lips.

The curving transparent lid of the casket was swinging silently back!

A PUNGENT odor wafted outward and the girl lay exposed to reach. Breathlessly he looked close. Faint flushing pink was flowing through her ivory cheeks, and a rhythmic pulsation of her breast began. Then a flutter jerked the blond lashes, they lifted. Deep brown eyes stared uncomprehendingly upward. Quickly calm intelligence came to those eyes, and the Sleeping Goddess sat up in the silken trough of the coffin—a miniature on ivory come to life; delicate features, gown sheer white, sleeveless, high-waisted and pleated.

A moment she absorbed the lean height of Jerry with speculative brown eyes. Queer hope came into them, and she smiled up.

"You are from the city of Nu-Der?" Her tones were liquid, the words oddly inflected, more of a classic form even than those of Neena.

Pulsing excitement made Jerry's voice disturbingly thick. "I've never heard of—Nu-Der."

The woman's face registered vague disappointment. "Then you live here in Iroq?"

"Hardly." Miles gave a short laugh. "I've been here only since this afternoon. Because I came from —outside, the people think I'm a god!"

Quick interest lit the brown eyes and the girl leaned forward eagerly. Her hair rippled in a golden cascade about slim shoulders.

"You *are* from beyond the Wall then! You have seen the shining city nestled in the far mountains?"

Jerry shook his head. "There is no city there."

The girl bowed her golden head and her voice came tonelessly: "It is as I suspected; Nu-Der is no more."

Miles struggled to keep growing wonder in hand. "Why do you speak of this city, Nu-Der? What is the purpose of the wall around Iroq, and why have you slept for ages in this white tower?"

The tawny eyes were studying Jerry's bronzed square face. Then abruptly she became conscious of the man's own intent stare. She flushed. "You speak my tongue oddly. Your land is far away?"

He nodded, gestured vaguely with his arm. "On the other side of the world across wide oceans."

"And you have great men of learning, of science?"

"Many," responded Miles.

"Then you will understand what I have to say," she explained. "Once I lived in Nu-Der. Never in all the world was there such a city. A city of science. Things to stun the mind with wonder; knowledge was the gauge of a man's wealth.

"But the mystery of life still escaped the masters. And so they built this great transparent cup, filled it with a thick atmosphere that would speed up evolution enormously. All the materials and constituents of life were placed in it. But no spore or germ was allowed to enter. Life would come of its own accord and they would watch it grow and evolve, and perhaps learn its immemorial secret.

"But they knew that even with the speeding effect of the gas many years would pass before life would appear; that civilizations might rise and fall."

Miles nodded eagerly. "Go on."

"So the scientists built this tower. I was chosen to dwell within it, travel down through the ages by suspended animation; gas within this golden box achieves that. Every five thousand years it would automatically open, return me to life so that I might check the progress of evolution within the wall, and carry that knowledge to some future race—and so it has been.

"Every five thousand years I have awakened and made brief studies of a few weeks, returning once again to my bed of sleep. I have seen the first wrigglings of life, have watched it grow into the weird forests yonder. I have studied humans on the long ladder of evolution, have seen them form the primitive empire of Iroq here within the wall.

"And during all these millenniums my shining city of Nu-Der has come with me, larger, more wondrous each time I beheld it. But alas, on my last awakening no scientists were here to greet me. I could not travel on foot across the burning desert to Nu-Der, and so I went to sleep again fearful that I was now fulfilling the duty for which I had been placed here —that my great civilization had crumbled somehow, to nothingness.

"You, man of the future, have confirmed that belief." The golden head bowed in sorrow.

MILES shifted his feet. The sheer immensity of her story whetted his wonder, yet even stronger

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than this curiosity was a desire to take the girl in his arms and comfort her. The loss of her city, her very people must have created a gnawing void within her. But all he could manage in way of consolation was a soft: "All things must end sometime."

The brown eyes lifted to his and they cleared bravely. "You are right. Regret is useless." Her delicate rose lips parted in a faint smile. "I am called Orleen, and you. . . ?"

"Jerry Miles."

"Jerry Miles," she repeated, her mellow voice imparting a liquid inflection to the syllables. "It is a pleasing name—and Jerry, the dials show that I have slept only four thousand years this time. Is it——"

"I woke you," he put in hastily. "When I saw you resting there so calm and lifelike, so beautiful I couldn't believe you dead. . . ." He clipped off his words, confused at their ardent rush.

A pleased flush colored Orleen's cheeks and her laugh was like the musical clatter of silver coins. "I do not mind. I had thought perhaps the natives of Iroq had discovered the means of opening my casket."

Miles frowned with sudden remembrance. "No. I don't understand it either. Their priestess has marvelous robots, yet no one seems to recognize those levers as being controls of some kind."

Again the woman's silver laugh sounded. "I gave those robots to the savages of Iroq four thousand years ago. I taught them my language, hoped the machines would hasten their march toward civilization. Apparently it was a useless gesture."

For a moment there was silence in the ornate rotunda while Miles tried to orient his rushing thoughts. The jig-saw mystery was piecing together bit by bit. This girl from the immemorial past sitting gracefully there like a golden goddess had truly been the keystone to the whole baffling structure. Incredible tale it was!

Abruptly as Miles stood in the clear light by the gilded casket he became aware of footsteps ascending on the stairway from below. Baseless surging panic gripped him.

He spun to Orleen. "Quick!" he whispered urgently. "Someone's coming. They mustn't find you awake!"

The girl's eyes widened with dread. She clutched at his arm. "You will not desert me, Jerry? You will wake me again?"

"I swear it! As soon as I'm able. Hurry, close the lid!"

She gave his arm a trusting squeeze, then dropped back among the silken plush of the casket. Her hand flicked over a tiny silver lever and the transparent lid swung silently into place. She looked up at Jerry, a tremulous smile about her lips. Then a second lever slid back beneath her hand. Somewhere within sounded the muffled escape of gas. Her eyelids fluttered, closed, and once again Orleen was the Sleeping Goddess of Iroq.

A footstep sounded behind Miles. He wheeled to look into the faintly smiling face of Neena. Taunting mockery shone boldly in her black eyes.

"Does Lord Zendfap find his quarters at the Palace so unsuited that he seeks shelter in the Temple? Or is it the beauty of the Sleeping Goddess that draws him?"

Dull anger surged within him. "Since when," he demanded incisively, "must a Lord account to you, Priestess?"

The expression on the exotic oval face did not alter. But she said humbly, "I beg your forgiveness," and gave a quick bow of her head. Then she turned. "Come. My metal servants wait to take us to the Palace."

CHAPTER V

Neena's Offer

NEXT morning when Miles woke among the piled blankets and pillows of the big stone room he made an immediate and chilling discovery. As he buckled on his cartridge belt and holster, he saw that his pistol was missing. A quick search assured him that it had not fallen among the cushions.

Anger and apprehension flared within him. Only two people, of course, would have the audacity or the reason to steal his gun while he slept: Neena and Administrator Borko.

The High Priestess might have doubted his godly eminence, was perhaps planning to someway capitalize on his appearance in Iroq, had taken his gun to assure her success.

Or Borko, fired by jealous hatred and belief that he, Miles, was not Zendfap, might have pilfered it.

In any event, Jerry knew that the weapon was irrevocably lost to him. The fact that its loss foretold danger did not add to his peace of mind.

Three red-jacketed men brought his breakfast. But when he sought to question them concerning the activities of Neena and Borko, they professed ignorance, withdrew hurriedly.

It was not until noon that Neena, accompanied by Borko, came to call upon him. The Priestess' slender pale-bronze figure was clothed in livid green, her ebon hair falling on the shoulders of a milky-white jacket. Dark oblique eyebrows and crimson lips gave exotic mystery to her face.

She extended a slim arm to Miles. "Lord Zendfap," she said, "we wish to show you more of the land of Iroq. My metal servants await us. . . ."

Borko's swarthly hawk-nosed face was carefully devoid of expression. He bowed low in greeting, saluted Miles as Lord Zendfap. Over his shoulders was the same purple chamys, voluminous enough, Jerry realized, to conceal a sword—or a *pistol*. But Miles determined not to mention the theft; it would do no good, would only be an admission of his concern.

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In the Palace's lower passageway the three robots stood like bulbous red spiders. Now both the first and second machines were provided with litters. Neena seated herself next to Miles; Borko took his position in the second automaton. At a call the stiff metal legs jerked into motion.

UPON noticing a movement in the underbrush, Neena let out a sharp command. The third robot darted forward. A pig-like six-legged animal scurried swiftly from under the pulpy leaves, but not swiftly enough. A flash of ruddy metal legs and in a trice the unfortunate beast was snapped off the ground in the grip of a coiling tentacle. It screamed horribly and its brown eyes bulged in death as the metal tentacle contracted .

Sickening disgust filled Jerry, most of it directed at the woman at his side. She was intently leaning forward, breast heaving with excitement. Borko, in the second robot, was leering appreciatively.

"Sport of the Gods!" cried Neena. "Nothing escapes my metal servants; they can scent and trail quarry to the ends of Iroq!"

Miles reclined far back in the swaying seat, thoughtfully silent. What was the point of this demonstration? A subtle warning calculated to impress him with their power? If so, it could not have originated on Borko's part, for he was plainly not a man of subtleties.

Dusk was near when the tour was completed and the robots finally directed back towards the village and the Palace. But Jerry's thoughts were of the gleaming white tower, and the golden-haired goddess immured there. The appeal in her voice for his return still lingered with him. He couldn't let her down; somehow he'd fulfill that hurried promise to awaken her once again.

When they reached the Palace, Neena conducted him to a room on the ground floor. Borko entered also, but the priestess turned quickly to him.

"You may leave, Administrator," she said calmly.

Instantly jealous anger flared on his harsh features, and a snarling protest rose to his lips.

She cut him short. "Go!"

A moment he stood, then bowed stiffly in assent. But as he turned away he shot a glance at Miles from eyes snapping with hatred.

THE room was small. Colored, finely-woven reed mats covered the stone floor, the walls ornate with flowing tapestries. At one side was a circular green-tiled bathing pool, on the other a large window giving into the dusk shadowed court. Smoke from the flickering cressets seemed incensed. The room, Jerry realized with vague discomfort, was typically feminine.

Neena was quick to see his wondering glance. "This is my chamber. I wish you to dine with me. . . ."

A soft tumbled mass of pillows was piled against the nearer wall and she drew him toward it, pulled him down with a slim bare arm. He seated himself Turkish-fashion on a cushion, sat awkwardly erect. He sensed that planned events were working into shape; that he must be on guard.

From her supine position of the pillows, Neena clapped her hands. Six trailing servants entered bearing food. They were short men, wearing the same style red tunics and white short-cut pantaloons Miles had seen before. The Priestess waved them away after they had deposited the trays on a cluster of tripods.

Jerry ate sparingly, aware that Neena only dabbed at her food. The inscrutable dark eyes rose often to his, and he was conscious that the meal was only the prelude of things to come. He nodded his head at the food.

"The people of Iroq live well, Priestess," he remarked, trying to ease an awkward situation.

"Only because the Gods are generous," she retorted silkily. "You are pleased with us, Lord Zendfap?"

He hid his wonderment. "I find no fault."

"Then you have chosen your wedding day?"

Inwardly Miles jumped. The blow had fallen from an unexpected quarter. He was aware that the woman had moved closer to him on the pillow, was regarding him from beneath lowered lashes. The best he could do was counter boldly.

"Why all this interest in the marriage, Priestess? What are days compared to ages of waiting? I see no reason for its immediate fulfillment."

Abruptly, as he half reclined on the cushions, he felt the vibrant warm nearness of Neena's body against his, caught the thick intoxicating perfume of her jet hair.

"Perhaps," she said, her voice a throaty whisper, "the *bride* grows impatient!"

The truth burst upon him in a single illuminating flood. And that flood was instantly absorbed in a maelstrom of emotion; for Neena's slim bronze arms had slid about his neck, soft yet strong as they pulled him toward the exotic upturned oval of her face. Alien depths of her eyes were aglitter with exultation.

Abrupt panic seized him. He tore loose, pushed her back upon the cushions.

"You are Priestess of Iroq," he growled at her severely. "And you are *mortal*. A mortal can not mate a god!"

Neena had drawn angrily erect, breast heaving. Then strangely she relaxed; a smile parted the full red lips.

"You speak truly," came her voice with perilous sweetness. "A mortal may not wed with immortal—but you are not Zendfap! *You are not a god!*"

JERRY felt a sudden weak deflatedness. Her words had stabbed like a knife ripping a bladder.

"I suspected from the first," she said triumphantly. "You knew too little of the ways of Iroq. And then last night in the Temple my beliefs were confirmed . . ."

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A gasp wrenched from his lips. "You heard Orleen and me?"

"Truly. I followed you to the Temple, heard every word between you. You are not a god—neither is the *Sleeper!*"

Setting his jaw, Miles faced her defiantly. "So what?" he gritted.

Faint mockery shone in her eyes and she shrugged delicately molded shoulders. "I do not care. In truth it has allowed me to make certain plans—"

"Then *you* took my gun?" interrupted Jerry impulsively.

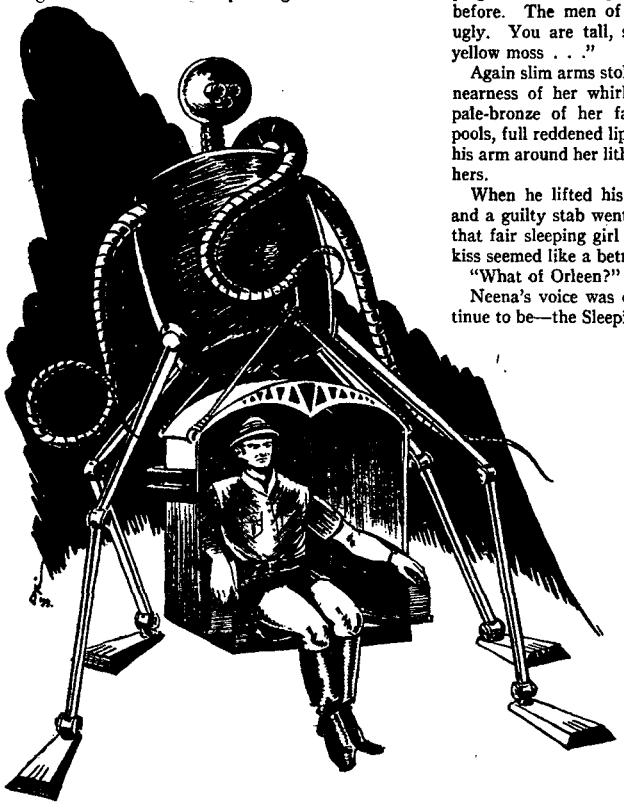
"Gun?" Neena's voice was querulous. "What is gun?"

"My thundering weapon."

She dismissed the matter with a petulant shake of her head. "I know nothing of your weapon."

And strangely, Miles knew that she had spoken truthfully. It was Borko . . .

Again the Priestess was speaking



"My people need never know you are not Zendtap; they are content, not unduly curious. No one would see wrong in our marriage!"

"A certain Administrator would hardly be pleased," Jerry pointed out.

"He can be—removed!"

"I'm sorry, Neena; your offer doesn't appeal to me."

Angrily the ebon head tossed. "You spurn a throne of the gods? A kingdom to do with as you choose? Wealth! Power! The whole of Iroq to do your bidding?"

"Oh, it isn't that—"

"What more could one desire?" she demanded with fierce intensity. "Am I ugly? Do you find me so repulsive you dread the thought of sharing my throne?"

"No one can deny your beauty, Neena—"

"Then what displeases you?" she murmured, slipping close to him again. "I have not seen your like before. The men of Iroq are thick and short and ugly. You are tall, slim, your hair is the color of yellow moss . . ."

Again slim arms stole about his neck, and the warm nearness of her whirled in his brain. The flushed pale-bronze of her face was upturned, eyes black pools, full reddened lips close . . . abruptly he threw his arm around her lithe body, crushed his lips against hers.

When he lifted his head he was trembling a bit, and a guilty stab went through him as he thought of that fair sleeping girl in the Temple. Somehow that kiss seemed like a betrayal.

"What of Orleen?" he asked huskily.

Neena's voice was close, mellow. "She shall continue to be—the Sleeping Goddess!"

The heady appeal of Neena vanished; he tore her arms roughly away, sprang to his feet.

FEATURES contorted, Neena leaped up. A small hand was digging in the lining of her jacket. Jerry stumbled backward in time to avoid the thrust of a slim ivory stiletto. He clutched her wrist, upsetting the silver trays as he wrenched it from her hand. He hurled the carved white weapon across the room where it shattered against the stone wall of the room.

With a choking cry of utter fury she hurled herself at him, slashing, clawing, biting. It was like holding

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an enraged tigress in his arms, and for a few seconds he struggled desperately to grasp those raking talons. But she fought with furious demoniac energy.

Miles realized forcibly that he had incurred in her a hatred that would be appeased only in his death. He lunged out with both hands, hurled her bodily backward onto the pile of cushions. A moment she lay there eyes blazing, face contorted. "Fool!" she shrieked. "I'll—"

Abruptly, in the midst of that blurred moment, a pistol shot crashed into the room. A bullet whined past Jerry's head.

Framed in the blackness of the open doorway was the stocky bull-form of Borko holding Miles' automatic in a lax hand. Surprised incredulity flooded his hawk-nosed face; for Miles had not broken like the urn when the weapon was turned on it . . .

Deliberately Jerry strode toward the Administrator. "No use, Borko," he growled. "The thundering weapon works only for me!"

Fear twisted the thick swarthy features, and Borko wheeled, plunged from view.

Neena's voice knifed out in call behind Jerry. And somewhere down the passageway beyond the door sounded a responsive mechanical thumping of metal feet. The robots!

That heavy reverberation woke blind surging terror within him; only too fresh in his mind was the demonstration he had witnessed. He wheeled, spurted across the brilliant reed mats, and as he scrambled over the thick window sill into the courtyard, Neena's hate-filled orders for pursuit reached his ears.

CHAPTER VI

Flight of the Gods

JERRY did not pause an instant, but lunged through the darkness among the weird vegetation of the court. A pulsing thought lent wings to his feet. Neena had called hunting with the robots "sport of the Gods!"

The moon was overhead, and everything glowed in a strange blue illumination. Clearly visible ahead was the white tower, and he made for it. There was double reason why he should go there, for he knew now that Orleen would not be safe from Neena's vengeance. The Priestess herself would guess his intent, and the dash to the Temple would resolve into a mad race, with chances about equal. Miles with a head start, Neena with the greater speed of the robots.

Fortunately the distance was not great, and Jerry covered it at top speed, dashing past startled natives in the moonlit dusk. At any moment he expected the mechanical thud of metal feet behind him. The white structure loomed above, and he was plunging across the low porch and into the blackness of the splendid corridor. Up the gentle sweep of the stairs to the ebon floor of the cupola. The beacon-like flare of the Sleeper's casket shone through the gloom.

Pale and beautiful she was, in the warm glow of the light-tube, and for a moment that loveliness held him. Then again he was twisting his bowie knife in the square depression of the golden box—with hasty assurance this time, for somewhere outside in the street came the clatter of multiple metal feet!

The curving transparent lid slid back as before, and renewed life was flowing through the slim figure within. Brown eyes opened to stare into Miles'. In that look was instant understanding. Orleen smiled.

"I knew you would return, Jerry!" came silvery tones. Sudden concern crossed her face; she sat up swiftly. "You're troubled. Something has happened?"

"Much!" he replied urgently. "Quick, Orleen, we've got to get out of here. We're in danger, both of us!"

Puzzled alarm showed on her white brow. "I don't understand . . ."

"No time to explain; they're right on my heels, three robots. Hurry!"

In the passageway below sounded harsh staccato of metal on stone. Neena was bringing the robots into the tower!

Jerry scooped up the white-draped form of Orleen from the casket. He placed her quickly on her feet, conscious as he did so, of her supple grace. But even as he led her toward the stairs, sound from the blackness beneath told him the robots were mounting the steps.

He set his jaw. "We're caught," he grated. "Too far to jump from the window, no use to hide, and I can't fight three robots with a dagger!"

SURPRISINGLY, Orleen was tugging on his arm, her voice an urgent whisper. "I have a way! The people of Iroq do not know this tower as well as they might."

She drew him toward the dusky curve that was the rotunda's wall. As her hand ran for a moment over the figured medallion work, the clatter on the stairway drew near. Then something clicked beneath her touch, and a panel opened, faint radiance showing. Together they ducked in; the door slid silently into place, cutting off outside sound.

It was an oblong little room they were in, pale illumination coming from the walls and ceiling. Cylindrical metal containers were piled in neat array.

"My secret store room," explained Orleen with a little gesture. "Food is here for use during my waking periods."

"Can you leave the tower from here?" demanded Jerry eagerly.

The golden head nodded. "Come . . ."

At her touch an opening appeared in the floor; a tiny spiraling stairway leading downward She led the way, Miles thumping at her heels. A minute later Orleen halted.

"Sh-h . . ."

A rectangle opened, and the golden girl peered

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forth. Then her hand found Jerry's, guided him out. They were in one of the dusk filled curving colonnades of the Temple.

"Come on," whispered Jerry, "we've got to reach the wall before those mechanical bloodhounds get wind of us!"

Silently they slipped through the ghostly gleaming splendor of the arcade, out of the tower and into the deserted streets of Iroq.

Lightly Orleen, daughter of a long forgotten people, ran at his side. No fear disturbed the pale beauty of her features; only calm trust. Indeed, thought Miles, she did not yet know the true gravity of the situation, and he could not bring himself to tell her of Neena's bloody thirst for revenge; that thirst would certainly put the Priestess on their trail again. It was, in fact, a desperate dash for their lives.

Soon the village was behind, the weird masses of the jungle about them. Miles slowed their pace to a trot; balloon-plants dotted the landscape, and there was danger of stumbling into the cruel projecting thorn-pikes. Then too, they'd have to conserve their strength; a final dash might well be the difference between life and death.

Still there was no sign of pursuit.

Evidently Neena still believed they were hid somewhere in the Temple. They reached the crest of a green-carpeted hillock, and Jerry stopped to look back.

They went on again, Orleen silent but uncomplaining at his side. Dull elation was mounting within Jerry. They were half way to the wall.

"Jerry!" gasped Orleen suddenly, tugged him to a halt. Her attitude was of intent listening. Miles turned, cocked his head.

Somewhere in the distance behind them, through the thick blue atmosphere, came the rich voice of Neena lifted in call. And as the blood drained from Jerry's face, a faint *thud thud thud* of pounding metal feet became audible.

MILES and the golden-haired girl sprang into the wild flight of panic. That stomping sound, horribly threatening in its mechanical rhythm, lent strength to their flagging muscles. They ran over the undulant terrain between the thick bubble-capped vegetation. And now the vivid green moss underfoot seemed to clutch at them with greedy malicious fingers.

Orleen stumbled, would have fallen had not Miles caught her. As he held her, the futility of that blind flight struck him. Only half the distance to the wall, and the robots close behind; to win such a race was a stark impossibility.

"No use, Orleen," he gasped. "We'll never make it." He cast a desperate glance about, rested his eye on the pulpy, heavy growths, looked hopelessly at the faintly gleaming bubbles, the huge balloon-plants tugging at brown cable-stalks . . .

The girl was close to him. "We can't hide," she pointed out. "The robots will scent us."

Jerry's eyes gleamed with frantic speculation as they caught upon the balloon-plants.

"No," he grated, "we can't hide—but we won't have to. Come on!"

Somewhere in the jungle, thumping metal feet were drawing near with unfailing sureness. Jerry hurried the girl toward the nearest balloon-plant. Her eyes were wide with wonder as he made an opening in the plant's thorn barrier by pulling sideway on the radiating shafts. He gestured with his head at the growth's stem.

"Climb it. Quick!"

Orleen looked helplessly at the tawny stalk stretching stiffly upward like a huge rope hanging from a balloon.

"But I . . . how . . .?"

"*Climb* it, woman! Your life depends on getting up there!"

Orleen smiled tremulously at him, stepped quickly between the long spear-thorns and began a struggling ascent of the plant's stalk.

Jerry groaned inwardly. Valiant little thoroughbred that she was, she was nevertheless barely inching up the cable—much too slow!

Abruptly he wheeled. Coming around a near clump of vegetation were two of the red robots, the sun mounting globes of their bodies catching the moonlight in cold flashes. Behind followed a third, carrying the familiar canopied litter. From it sounded Neena's shout, suddenly exultant. She had seen the fugitives.

But the robots did not spring ruthlessly upon Miles; rather they took positions behind the balloon-plant to prevent his escape. And Jerry saw the reason. The squat form of Borko was hunched forward in the seat beside Neena, a huge sword across his knees!

CHAPTER VII

Balloons of Chance

MILES gritted his teeth. Whacked to pieces without a chance to fight back, eh? Not while he had a brain and two arms! He whipped out his hunting knife, began whittling furiously at the base of one of the spear-thorns; its tough fourfoot length would make an ideal rapier.

The robot had halted with its passengers a short distance away, and Borko, like a grim diabolical gnome in his purple cape, stepped forth. Neena said nothing, did not move; a cruel statue of exotic beauty.

Desperately Jerry cut at the hard stem. Borko stalked forward confidently, huge sword upon his thick shoulder, gloating satisfaction showing in the harsh lines of his face. He chuckled deeply.

"Your roaring weapon kills only for you," he called. "Aye, but I have something that kills for me!"

Brandishing the great sword in both hands, the stocky Administrator bounded forward. Miles

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slashed through the pike just in time to meet the rush. Borko swung his weapon ax fashion, its blade descending in a hissing arc. Jerry, still on his knees, got in a short jabbing thrust of his improvised spear. It struck nothing; but Borko's own swing was diverted, and the very violence of that effort nearly impaled him on the balloon-plant's outward projecting spikes.

The dark man gave ground, and Miles sprang to his feet. Borko charged again this time his hewing blade directed at the menace of his opponent's spear. The blow was a glancing one, yet there was such force in it that Jerry's lance was almost ripped from his hands. He recovered on the instant, gave a desperate jab of the spear.

Fatigued as Miles was from his recent flight, there was neither accuracy or power behind that thrust. Nevertheless it caught Borko in the left shoulder.

With a roar of pained rage the man leaped backward, pressed a hand to his shoulder. And that hand came away red with blood. Sudden fear was reflected on the dark face. Miles sought to follow his advantage with a quick jab, and in doing so, found that Borko's wound had not impaired the efficiency of his muscular arm. For he met a blow from the huge sword that whistled within an inch of his face.

But the purple-garbed man's confidence had vanished, Miles could sense; he was fighting now with desperation. And slowly Jerry beat him around until his back was almost touching the out-thrust spikes of the balloon-plant's stalk. Then abruptly Borko's flashing blade caught Jerry's spear dead-center. There was a snapping of fibers and the broken shaft was wrenched from his hands, hurled away.

STUNNED, Miles stood rooted to the ground, his mind refusing to credit what his senses told him was horrible truth.

Instantly Borko's leering bravado flooded back. "Now, infidel," he shouted triumphantly, "you shall see how my weapon kills!" And like a baseball player striking a ball, he swung the ponderous sword.

Had that blow landed it would have cleaved a man in two. It grazed Jerry's shoulder as he ducked. The very power of that wasted effort twisted Borko's body half around, and thus for a moment an opening appeared.

Jerry leaped forward, swinging his fist from the ground in a terrific blow. His knuckles crashed squarely under the man's chin. Borko's stocky form was literally hurled backward and a single death shriek left his lips.

Two of the balloon-plant lances, bloody red, protruded through his chest.

"You are skillful with your fists!" said a throaty mocking voice behind Jerry.

He whirled. Neena sprawled languorously in the cushioned litter. Moonlight shone on the perilous beauty of her face, the taunting curl of her painted lips.

"Skillful, yes," continued the honeyed voice, "but I wonder what your fists will avail you against my robots?"

Miles made no effort to reply. He glanced up at the floating plant overhead where the white form of Orleen was laboriously inching her way upward. Then he was parting the spear-thorns, was shinnying up the cable-stalk after her.

An amused chuckle sounded from below. "Fools! Do you think you are safe there? It will be pleasing to watch you cling until you fall. Or if I grow impatient my metal servants will pull the plant down. . . ."

Jerry climbed swiftly until he was just beneath Orleen. The huge green bag of the plant was a yard above her. He looked down at Neena fifty feet below and he could contain himself no longer. He laughed grimly at her.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Priestess, but we're not staying here!"

And he jerked out his bowie knife, began to cut the tawny anchoring cable beneath him. Instantly Neena grasped his intention. She called to the robots, and her voice was shrill with fury. They lurched forward, one on each side of the plant, their coiling tentacles whipped out, grasped the cable-stalk and began to pull it down like men drawing in rope.

A little gasp sounded from Orleen as the floating plant lunged precariously. With legs folded and clamped around the stalk, and holding meantime with one hand, Jerry sliced away at the tough stem stretching beneath him. But a command from Neena brought increased activity from the robots; their appendages jerking down the pliant stalk like the furiously flailing arms of a steam engine.

He could see the Priestess standing intently, as motionless as a bronze figurine, yet he sensed the flaming hatred that burned within her. And directly below, the franticly working tentacles of the robots drawing nearer and nearer—arms that would crush and tear if they chanced to come within reach.

Then abruptly Miles cut through the stalk. Upward surged the balloon-plant carrying its cargo effortlessly; it had in truth become a balloon. Below, the robots and the statuesque form of Iroq's High Priestess were dwindling dots that soon merged into the mottled expanse of the moonlit jungle. In the distance was a pale finger of white pointing silently heavenward. . . .

Later, the man and woman stood upon the wall looking down at the mistiness that was sleeping Iroq. Orleen's golden head was close to Miles' shoulders, and her voice was husky, eager.

"I—I'm glad, Jerry, that we had to leave this—test tube! I'm tired of wandering through the centuries. I want to live a *normal* woman's life!"

For answer Jerry Miles' arm tightened about her shoulders.

THE END

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REVOLT OF THE ROBOTS

By ARTHUR R. TOFTE

Ambition gripped Tarra Greghold, and she sought to rule the world, unaware that a robot mind could become ambitious as well

CHAPTER I

Tarra Greghold

DEEP within Tarra Greghold raged a fierce jealousy. The people of the year 2860 A. D. still felt the passions of primitive man, but they had learned not to show them. And Tarra, with her keen-eyed personal robot, Q9T9, watching from the corner, tried as well as she could to conceal her jealousy.

As she lay on the couch in her sun chamber, watching the three dimensional screen on the ceiling, Tarra was only an average girl of her time. The slight fuzz of hair on the top of her head was straw-colored and gave to her a look of baldness. Her chin was small, and her thin cheeks were pinched and wan. Her slender legs and arms and almost childlike body, under

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the sheer transparent covering of her gown showed scrawny and weak as she stretched wearily. Tarra Greghold was not beautiful, but by the standards of her day, neither was she especially unattractive.

Tarra was in love with young Jol Herrick, the tall slender biologist, who at that moment was giving his final lecture before his class at the School of Science. But in her jealousy she hardly listened to Herrick's words as she watched the faces of the girl students who gathered around him, watching him work. These girls, pale and thin and with fuzzy tops, were no prettier than herself, she felt, but among them must be the one Herrick was choosing instead of her.

Then, as she watched, the girl on the couch saw the young biologist, his smooth bald head glistening under the lights of the laboratory, take up a cage and hold the opening to the door of a large glass cage on the table. Out ran a white rat, and like the girls in the laboratory, Tarra too was forced to gasp with surprise. For the rat was the largest she had ever seen in any laboratory experiment—almost twice as large as a normal rat. Then, Tarra listened while Herrick explained.

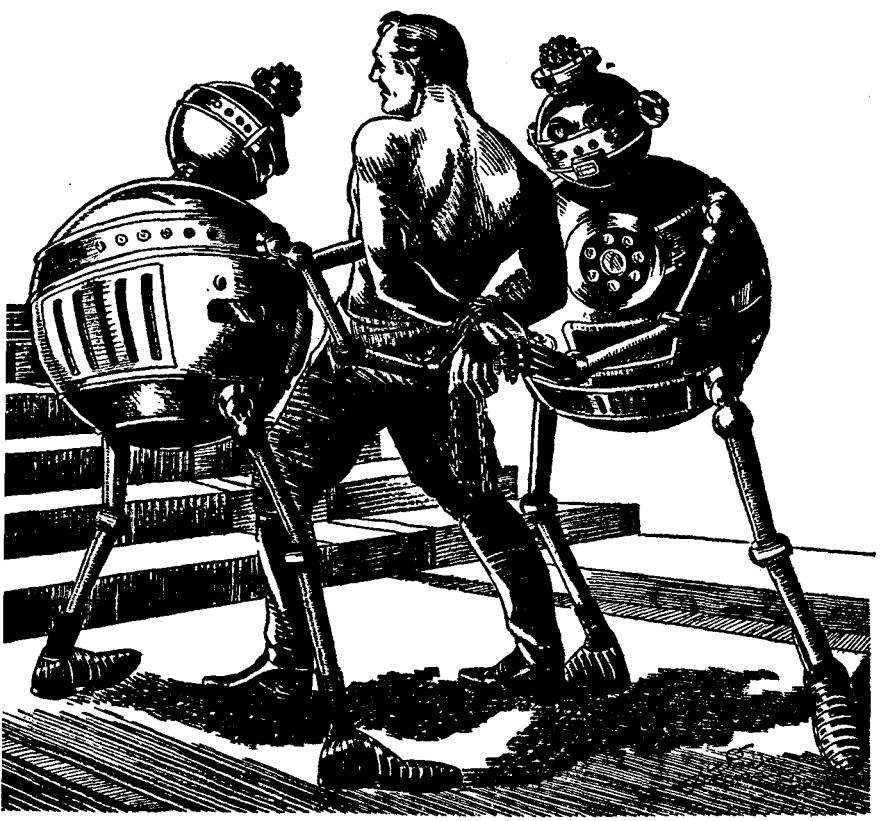
"For a month," he said in his soft high voice, "I have treated this rat with my new hormone compound, developed as you know from those new substances brought back from Venus by the Justin memorial expedition."

Herrick proudly faced the students before him.

"Think what this means," he said, "—a hormone that will increase the strength and size of animals. Who knows where this will lead!"

And as he said this, the young biologist looked at one of the girl students nearest him and smiled.

TARRA, unable to watch any longer, motioned to Q9T9 to shut off the connection. With a little bow and a slight scrape of his gears as he got into mo-



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tion, the robot did as he was commanded.

"I, too, was watching," Q9T9 said in the carefully worded manner of the servant robot kind.* "If my mistress wishes a suggestion, I have one."

"Speak up," Tarra murmured wearily.

"I can see that you are unhappy, my mistress," the robot said. "Perhaps my suggestion may help you."

Tarra looked up from her couch at the four-foot high robot and smiled wanly.

"You love Dr. Herrick," the robot said bluntly, and came a step closer to the girl on the couch.

"Yes, I love Dr. Herrick," she admitted weakly. "But how can you help me?"

The robot's metallic eyes sparkled eagerly.

"For seventeen generations I have served you and your maternal ancestors. Even in that short time of 400 years I have seen many changes. One of the strangest, as you know, was the law of fixed population whereby no more births were allowed than there were deaths the previous year, and the right to have children was granted by law only to certain ones. You are jealous because Dr. Herrick has been chosen as a father in the coming year—and you are afraid that he will select one of his girl students as his mate."

"Yes, that is true," Terra murmured softly as she turned her head away.

Q9T9 hesitated only a moment and then continued.

"Dr. Herrick has made a great discovery, but he fails to see its importance. He has shown that he has found a hormone capable of increasing the strength and size of animals. The human race is dying, dying from inaction and weakness. But humans are animals. Why can't these new hormones be used to develop a new and stronger race of humans?"

"But why should we be stronger and bigger?" Tarra asked. "We have you robots to do our work."

"Yes, we do the work," Q9T9 replied, "but unless the human race is revitalized soon, there shall one day come a time when there will be no more of you. Weak flesh dies easily. You will all be dead. And then only the robots will be left."

The girl shuddered and closed her eyes.

"Dr. Herrick does not yet realize the importance of his discovery," Q9T9 said softly, "and should you go to him, offering yourself as the first human test. . . ."

Tarra looked up at her robot with wonder.

". . . When you are grown full and strong," Q9T9 continued slyly, "he will not fail to love you and choose you for his mate."

The girl on the couch moved her limbs and sat up slowly. The robot's words had stirred her as nothing in her life had done before.

"If I could be the only one to be treated. . . " she whispered to herself.

"You can be," the robot replied. "And if you make sure that you are the only one, there is no limit to what you can do. You can do anything you wish. Anything!"

CHAPTER II

Decathalon

TARRA GREGHOLD looked at her robot servant closely, curiosity at last overcoming the jealous rage which had been poisoning her mind.

"What do you mean that if I am the only one to be treated I can do 'anything'?" she asked.

Q9T9 stared with his expressionless eyes at his mistress and replied carefully, biting off each phrase mechanically.

"In 2449," he began, "a little more than four hundred years ago, Julio Justin died. I was over a hundred years old at that time. You know, of course, that he was the last of the great dictators. With tremendous power and energy he came to be emperor of the world. Under him there were no nations, no different peoples. Under him was one nation, one people. He was the last vestige of barbaric man.

"But even in his time," Q9T9 went on, "men were weak. It was Justin's sorrow and regret that he had no son to whom to leave the world empire he had founded, for with his strong rule all wars were banished and peace was everywhere. He wanted to carry on his hope of building up the vitality of the human race. At his death he left a will. In his will he established a world-committee to rule his empire from this world-city of Shago—on one condition and with one possible exception."

"And what was that?" Tarra asked.

*Like all of mankind in this peaceful, calm age, every task was performed by robots, even questions were answered. Q9T9, Tarra's robot, had been given the most advanced mechanisms. There was hardly anything he couldn't do. The history of the world, all the great scientific truths of the ages, the knowledge of all time were recorded indelibly upon his copper brain pan. She had only to ask, and any important bit of information on anything that had ever happened was immediately forthcoming. Q9T9 had been her mother's robot, and her mother's mother's, and on back for seventeen generations.—Author.

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"Justin said in his will, that if anyone could ever achieve the physical ability to break the decathalon records established in the barbaric Olympics of the 20th century, that person could inherit his kingdom and the rule of the world."

Tarra stared at her robot. "And you think. . . ." she whispered huskily.

"Yes," the robot replied. "If you go to Dr. Herrick and offer yourself as the first human test, you may one day rule the world."

Tarra leaned back on the couch and laughed softly to herself. And as she laughed, plans formed in her head. Jealousy and love hunger filled her with a keen desire for a chance to show Jol Herrick that she was a woman to be respected . . . and loved.

"I shall go to him at once," she said, and motioned to Q9T9 to help her rise from the couch. There was a smile on the girl's face as she leaned on the robot and went with him out through a doorway to a little balcony overlooking the great world-city of Shago. She allowed her servant to fasten her securely in her private transport car and then she touched a button that sent the little car hurtling through the maze of sky traffic along a directional beam that was clear and unobstructed.

IN the three minute journey to Herrick's laboratory, Tarra saw nothing of the great domed glass sky overhead, built by Julio Justin's genius 400 years before, nor of the tall orderly rows of glass cylinders, five hundred feet high, in which people lived, nor the flashing of cars hurtling past her on other directional beams. Tarra's thoughts were all of the young biologist whom she loved.

After her car had come to rest on the narrow landing terrace jutting out from his laboratory on the 34th floor, she allowed Herrick's robot servant, V6X3, to escort her in to the laboratory.

"Tarra," the young scientist cried with surprise, "it is good to see you again. You are not angry with me any more, are you?"

The girl touched her lips to the young man's smooth cheek and smiled.

"No, I am not angry now. I've come to offer amends. I heard your lecture this afternoon and I want to be the first to try your hormones."

"But a girl!" he exclaimed. "I should experiment longer before I try it on a human being."

"Think how it would bring fame to you," she urged. "And think what it would do for the human race. You would be the most famous man in the world."

"If I try it on a human, it should be on a man, not a woman," he declared.

"It would bring me fame, too," Tarra replied softly, coming closer to him and touching his soft hairless face with her hand. "For my sake, will you?"

Jol Herrick laughed a quick nervous laugh as he dismissed his fears. "All right," he agreed. "We will start the treatments tomorrow. In three or four weeks we should know the results."

"In three or four weeks we will be famous," the girl declared. Then she called from the doorway, "I'll be back in the morning."

A FEW minutes later she was in her own sun chamber, Q9T9 removing the robe from her shoulders.

"I saw and heard all," the robot said.

"Yes, and tomorrow I begin the treatments," Tarra cried as she slipped wearily down on the couch.

And in the days and weeks that followed, during the process of being treated, Tarra Greghold began to fill out, to acquire a new voluptuous roundness in her body. Her eyes sparkled with new life. Her hair grew long and heavy and fell in a blond cascade around her broadening shoulders, supple with new, firm strength.

But Jol Herrick, in his eagerness to chart the changes in the girl, failed utterly to perceive the growing beauty of the girl. Tarra noted this with chagrin, but managed to conceal her feelings. The time would soon come, she felt, when he would be only too willing to come to her.

The thought of her ultimate triumph when he should finally realize how much superior she was to her sisters, and when his emotions would be awakened, as they must be, gave her great anticipatory pleasure. In fact, as the days passed, she found herself experiencing the gamut of human emotions as she never had felt them—so intense, so strong, so vibrant.

And her brain worked amazingly well—so that she planned for long hours, of the future.

And as the days went by, something strange and fierce seized hold of her, a driving force that ate at her mind like some atavistic hunger. With the growing strength of her body, there came also a craving for

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power. It was like one of Herrick's huge rats gnawing at her vitals. She couldn't stop now.

One day, in Herrick's laboratory, she stood watching his slender body now so much weaker than her own. A smile of pleasure was on her lips.

"The treatments, you say, are over?" she asked softly.

Herrick looked up and smiled wearily. The strain of the past month had drained from him most of his normal strength and vitality.

"Yes, they are over," he replied as he looked proudly at her tensed body, now so round and full in the clinging gown she wore. "They are over . . . and a complete success. Perhaps now we can begin to restore all mankind to full vitality and strength, as soon as another expedition can be sent to Venus for more of this hormone compound."

"And in the meantime?" Tarra asked.

"Oh, I have enough of my compound in this refrigerator to take care of half a hundred persons."

"Half a hundred," Tarra smiled wryly. "But how will you convince the World Committee that your hormone is a success? Not by treating a half hundred?"

"No," Herrick nodded. "I think you are proof enough. When I show them how much superior you are to all other humans, they must believe."

Tarra laughed. Back in her sun chamber Q9T9 would be watching her and listening to her at this moment. Now was the time for her to strike her first blow.

"I have been hoping you would say that," she said. "I have been preparing for it. For weeks I have been training myself to do various athletic feats. Have you ever heard of the ancient Olympics of the barbaric 20th century? They had a series of events they called the decathalon, to discover which was the best all 'round athlete—running, jumping, throwing. The records set in 1964 have never been beaten. In the 21st century, as you probably know, the Olympics were dropped. Now, I believe I can break the Decathalon record set in 1964!"

Jol Herrick looked at the girl with surprise and nodded.

"It would be dramatic," he said with a start. "The World Committee would have to believe then."

"Why not call a meeting of the Committee for tomorrow afternoon?" Tarra suggested. "Hold it in the great central park in the city. I shall be there at fifteen o'clock."

And as Jol Herrick opened the door of his laboratory for the girl to leave, his hand was trembling and his pale blue eyes were glistening with moisture.

"Tomorrow will be the greatest day of my life," he said.

And a few minutes later, when Tarra had returned to her apartment and was greeted by her robot slave, she too threw back her head and said, "Tomorrow will be the greatest day of my life."

And then she looked at the little being before her and added, "tonight you will go to Jol Herrick's laboratory and destroy all the hormone compound which he has there. I want no rival."

Q9T9's cold metallic eyes sparked with electric intensity. "My mistress," he said, "is proving that she is worthy of being ruler of the world."

CHAPTER III

Ruler of the World

TARRA GREGHOLD sat quietly in her transport car with her robot slave as she watched with amusement the arrival of the World Committee at the meeting place in the great park. Old and feeble, most of them were. They arrived singly, each with his private robot supporting his tottering form. They were thin and weak with deep sunken eyes and owl-wise faces, and hairless, shiny pates.

Tarra, from the shelter of her car, watched Jol Herrick talk to the forty or more members of the assembled Committee. She saw him display one of his huge white rats. She saw him talk earnestly and fervidly as old Dr. Netherstone, head of the Committee, shook a bony finger under the young man's nose as though challenging him to prove what he had said.

Then she saw Herrick turn in her direction and motion to her to come forth from her private car.

Tarra stepped into view, and heard the cry of amazement that went up from the members of the Committee. She smiled to herself as she realized what a sensation she must be to their pale eyes—like a woman out of some ancient history book, an Amazon direct from the war-filled 20th century or the even more primitive periods. And as she walked straight toward old Dr. Netherstone with mighty strides, she saw the old philosopher blink and shake his head with wonder.

"My name is Tarra Greghold," she said to the Committee in a strong, clear, vibrant voice. "I propose to prove to you that I am as strong as Dr. Herrick has just now told you. My robot has in his right hand a timepiece such as the ancients used, with the same time intervals that they used. Distances have been marked off in the park here, as you note. I now further propose to attempt to break the decathalon records set in the Olympics of 1964."

Tarra quietly waited, the smile still on her face, as Jol Herrick quickly explained to the members of the Committee what the Olympics were and what the Decathalon events consisted of.

Then the girl nodded to her robot, and began one by one, to go through the events of the ancient Decathalon, running faster, jumping better, and throwing farther than any human had ever done before. At the conclusion of the extraordinary performance, the members of the Committee feebly gathered around her, croaking their hoarse congratulations. Only Dr. Netherstone shook his head in doubt.

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TARRA allowed Q9T9 to drape a robe around her bare shoulders. Then she took a paper from her robot and held it out to the tall, angular head of the Committee.

"Doctor," she said quietly, "this paper is a copy of Julio Justin's will written in 2449, just before he died and left the world-empire to the Committee. Surely you know of it?"

Dr. Netherstone lifted his eyes to the girl who towered over him and at Jol Herrick who stood beside her, and a look of sudden fear swept across his thin face.

"What does this mean?" the old philosopher asked.

"It means that I have just carried out the terms of Julio Justin's will—and I hereby claim the rulership of the world. For over four hundred years you have ruled by this will. I now dissolve the World Committee—for always. Gentlemen, I am your new ruler by Julio Justin's own will!"

Tarra looked with continued amusement at the confusion her words had caused among the feeble members of the group. She saw with pleasure Herrick's complete bewilderment. And Dr. Netherstone was squinting up at her as though he thought her mad. Here was something, she knew, that these weak old men were unable to answer. She knew that in this orderly world where everything went by rote and right that her legal claim was answerable. She had fulfilled the obligations of Justin's will and centuries of idle life and easy ways had made the entire human race an easy prey to her physical superiority and stronger will.

Tarra Greghold laughed an arrogant, disdainful laugh. Then she turned to Q9T9 and said, "Take me to the World Conference Hall. That will be my temporary palace until I can have a new one built."

In the days that followed, the strong hand of Tarra Greghold became all important through the huge world city of Shago which she now dominated. Robots and humans alike were mobilized to do her bidding. Although no new building work had been done for over four hundred years, Tarra ordered that a new palace be built for her on the grounds of the great central park in the middle of the city—a palace such as even Julio Justin had never imagined.

It was not to be circular as were all the other structures in the city, but cone-shaped with the top pinnacle to be her living quarters. And the glass to be used was not the semi-transparent material of the other buildings, but an opaque glass that admitted light and ultra violet rays of the sun and that allowed her to look out without being seen—a glass whose use had been known as early as the 20th century.

DURING the first month, the various men and women who were ordered to the task of working on the new palace fell in their tracks. Some of them died of burst hearts, utterly incapable of the sustained physical effort which Tarra was now demanding of them.

And Tarra, the new lust for power seizing her, ordered that all robots be put under her will. She commanded that each person who did not want to work on the palace to come to her and voluntarily give up his private robot, turning over to Tarra the will control that held the robot in bondage.

Soon the girl was in control of the entire robot population of the great world city—nearly ten million. Ten million robots marched to her command. In the meantime, tens of thousands of humans died from inability to take care of themselves. But the palace work went on. Robots worked by day and by night, ceaselessly raising the palace, level upon level.

And then, one evening shortly after it was finished, Tarra stood upon the topmost point of her towering palace and looked out over the strangely motionless city below her. Q9T9 stood beside her.

"These humans of yours are weak things," Q9T9's voice box clicked. "The city is too good for them."

Tarra looked down at her little metal slave and nodded.

"Exactly," she agreed, "the city is too good for these puny humans. They die like flies when they have to work."

"Why not outcast them to the great dry plains outside the city's dome and let them find their own shelter?" the robot suggested eagerly, his eyes sparkling.

"The city is of no use empty," Tarra replied.

"There are ten million robots in the city. They would give your city life and energy."

"Life and energy!" Tarra repeated as she looked up through the transparent dome overhead at the night sky. "That is what I admire. I could be ruler of a kingdom of deathless robots. I could achieve anything then—anything!"

"And there would be death to all humans?" Q9T9 asked slyly.

"There would be death to all humans," Tarra replied. Then she paused as a new thought struck her. "But when I died, who would lead the robots?"

Q9T9 replied with care. "Before you died, you could command all robots to obey me, releasing your will control to me. Then I would be ruler until the rust of eternity struck at our vitals."

Tarra Greghold looked down at her robot slave suspiciously. "I'll allow no ambitions, mechanical one, until my normal life has ended."

Then she sighed as she looked out over the vast city, thinking of puny, weak Jol Herrick for whom she had made all this effort, "If only there were a man worthy of me in the whole world . . . perhaps then there could be a race of humans worthy of inheriting this empire and carrying on my work."

But, as she spoke, Q9T9's eyes sparked maliciously.

CHAPTER IV

The Bearded Stranger

IN the terrible days that followed when Tarra Greghold's 20th century barbaric ruthlessness was at its

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height, she called meetings of thousands of humans at a time and had them run through violent exercises. Those that dropped from burst blood vessels and ruptured hearts were hauled away by robots and dumped into incinerators. The survivors dragged themselves wearily back to their couches.

Tarra knew that the people feared her and hated her, but with the new power and strength in her own limbs came also a cruel lust for torture. As her body had returned to the primitive state of the 20th century, so had her mind reverted to the original passions of that mad, sentient period. The men—weak, hairless, irresolute, bending to her will—aroused in her only the utmost disdain.

Then one day it happened—

Word came to her that a man had been seized far to the west of the city by a wandering group of her robots searching through the ancient ruins of a semi-barbaric city of the 21st century. But the strange thing was that the man was taller than other men, bigger of frame, stronger, and he had long black hair on his head, and he was dressed in tattered rags.

When Tarra Greghold heard this news from Q9T9, she tried to hide from him the sudden leap of her pounding heart, the glow of eagerness that flushed her cheeks. Something inside her seemed to tell that at last he was come—the man she had been yearning for, the man who would be a fit mate for her. She ordered him brought to her at once.

A few hours later, Tarra stood in her central chamber in the apex of her conical palace, with Q9T9 at her side, the two of them staring at the great gold elevator doors that were slowly opening. Through the doors came a small file of robots, bringing with them in chains such a man as Tarra had never seen before.

He was taller by half a head than she. His black hair reached almost to his shoulders. Fierce, dark eyes stared back at her insolently. And Tarra could see between the tatters of his clothes the bulging muscles of his arms and thighs, supple and smooth with youth. This man, she knew, was the man she wanted for her mate! Tarra smiled. It was the first real smile that had softened her face since she had taken Jol Herrick's hormones. And as she smiled, she motioned to the muscular one to come closer. Then she ordered the robots from the room.

"What is your name?" she asked. "And where do you come from?"

For a long moment, the huge man stood silently gazing back into her eyes.

"Call me Jork," he replied in a deep, rumbling voice. Then he looked at her full, rounded figure. "And I come from the same place you do."

"But that is impossible," Tarra replied. "I have never heard of a man like you. I know there are no more like me. I am the strongest person in the world."

Jork looked at her. "Except for me," he said coldly.

Tarra's eyes narrowed and a quickening flush came to her cheeks. Slowly her fists clenched and unclenched. The force of Herrick's hormones had given her tremendous powers of courage and love of combat. And here before her stood, for the first time since she had become a giantess among humans, another being worthy of battle with her. Intuitively she felt that she had to test his strength, to see if he really were fit to be her mate and to help her start a new race of super-humans.

"I am Tarra, ruler of the world—because I am the strongest," she cried with passion as she hit the chained man across the face with the back of her hand.

JORK never blinked an eye nor moved a muscle. Instead he continued to glare back insolently at her.

Suddenly the girl leaned toward him, her whole manner softened. She caressed his hair with loving and tender fingers.

"You have beautiful long hair," she said softly. "You and I were meant for each other. The rest of humanity is not worth saving, but you and I—we have a duty and a destiny. I am ruler of all this great world city. You shall be my consort prince. You shall help me rule a kingdom of robots."

The man stirred restlessly under her caresses.

"And what if I refuse?" he asked disdainfully.

Tarra stepped back away from him and shook her head. "You wouldn't dare. I am ruler of Shago and nothing can keep me from what I want. And I want you."

"And if I accept," the brawny one's voice rumbled.

Tarra smiled. "We shall be the only human beings in a world of robots. Ten million of them, there are, to do our bidding. There is nothing we can't have, nothing we won't be able to do.

"First we shall kill off all human beings—they are of no use. Then we shall set out to do all the things the human race has never been able to do. Perhaps we can set up regular communication with Venus. Not just one trip like the Justin Memorial Expedition—but a regular service. Perhaps we can wage war—real war—with the Venusians and bring them under our control. They are probably more worthy of living than our earthly humans. We might re-colonize earth with them, flesh and blood slaves to wait on us and our robots. We shall build more and greater cities like Shago and make use of all those waste lands which history tells us once were fertile and teeming with people.

"Some day," she continued, "I shall be empress of a greater world than has ever been, and you will be my first assistant."

Jork grinned with sardonic disdain.

"I too, know something of history," he said. "And if I remember correctly, the barbaric 20th century was full of men — dictators they called them — who were as mad as you. They thought they could kill and pillage and dominate their world as you now want to dominate yours. But history also tells us that they

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had their short day, and it was soon over and that even Julio Justin was but a brief throwback to that day. And now you come, you with your return of the barbaric lust—and all because of Herrick's hormones!"

Tarra recoiled with surprise. "What do you know about Herrick's hormones?" she cried.

"What do I know about them?" Jork replied bitterly. "I know everything about them, for I am Jol Herrick!"

CHAPTER V

The Robot Army

"YOU—Jol Herrick!" Tarra cried in amazement. "But I had all your compound destroyed. You can't be Herrick."

The huge man squared his broad muscular shoulders.

"Yes, you destroyed all my compound as I found when I returned from that test in the park. But you forgot the rats that I treated. I made new compound from those rats. Then I went away from the city. I treated myself. I wanted to find a way to destroy you. Then your robots found and brought me here."

The man lifted the heavy gold chains that held his arms together.

"These may hold me now," he said coldly, "but some day I shall destroy you."

Tarra sank back on a couch. Everything that she had hoped and yearned for was slipping away from her. Then she sprang to her feet and rang for her robot slave.

"I'll make you surrender to me," she said fiercely. "I'll have you beaten and tortured until you are ready to come to me on your hands and knees."

The doors of the golden elevator clicked behind her, and she turned to see Q9T9 looking at them with a sly glint in his eyes.

"You rang for me?" the robot asked.

Tarra nodded toward Herrick. "Have you known all along who he is?"

Q9T9 bowed slightly. "Yes, my mistress. I thought it would give you pleasure to find out for yourself. I am only four hundred years old, you know, and I am not accustomed to your present 20th century mental and physical condition."

Tarra looked from her robot to Herrick.

"Take him," she commanded, "to the torture room on the 77th floor. I'll show him a few samples of the ancient forms of torture."

A few minutes later, Q9T9 was back, bending with his mechanical bow to her.

"Your man," he clicked out the words, "is fastened to the rack of the ancient Inquisition. He awaits your pleasure."

"You have done well," Tarra said distractedly. Then she turned and looked at her robot closely.

"Once you made a suggestion, mechanical one, that brought me to the rule of the world. Perhaps you have a suggestion now that could win this man to me."

Q9T9 stood motionless, his glass lens eyes staring straight before him.

"Yes, I have a suggestion, my mistress," he replied.

"What is it?"

Q9T9 stiffened slightly as though there were an actual physical flesh and blood surge in him to increase his stature. Then he replied—

"As ruler of the world you can never win this man. No man's love can be won on the torture rack. It is as a woman that you must win him. For as he is the only man in the world fit to be your mate, so you are the only woman in the world worthy of him. Go to him as a woman, offering him your love and an equal share in your rule."

"BUT I can't do that. I am the ruler—I shall never give that up!"

"Of course not," Q9T9 insisted. "But you can appear to. Give me temporary rule over the will-controls of the robots. You can then go to him, not as world ruler but as a woman. In the meantime I will wait for you to return. The plan is the only one that will succeed."

Tarra Greghold shook her head doubtfully. But she walked over to the instrument-panel on the gold desk, touched a button that tuned her in to every one of the ten million robots in the world city.

"Hear me, robots of Shago," she said. "Until I return you will take your orders from Q9T9. Your will-controls for that time will be under his command."

Then Tarra walked over to the gold elevator. But before she entered the cage, she faced her robot slave again.

"And just to make certain that you do not play me false, ambitious one, I retain my will-control over you and I order you not to leave this room until I return."

The girl stepped back into the elevator. It was not until the doors were closing behind her that she saw Q9T9 hurrying to the gold desk to touch the button that would put him in contact with the ten million robots. A moment of suspicion seized her, but the doors closed and she dropped in an instant to the 77th floor, doubt and fear momentarily forgotten.

As she left the elevator and walked past the guard of robots who stood outside the double-thick doors of the ancient torture room, she noticed their rapt attention as though they were listening to a message.

She motioned to one of the robots to open the doors for her. He didn't move—an unthinkable failure to obey! With a gasp of exasperation, Tarra seized the door handles and drew it open. Then as she stepped into the torture room, she turned and looked at the group of robots.

They were marching stiffly toward her.

"STOP where you are," she cried.

The robots marched closer. Something was wrong. Then she realized that she no longer had hold over their will-controls. Could Q9T9 really have played her false?

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The thought struck her like a blow, sending her reeling back into the room. Quickly she bolted the doors on the inside. Had all this scheme merely been a plan of her own robot's to gain control over her?

In her bewildered mind, the pieces of the puzzle began to fit together—Q9T9's first suggestion about world power, his advice to kill off all humans, his idea of releasing the will-controls of ten million robots to him. It was all clear to her now.

Not seeing the man stretched grotesquely on the torture rack, Tarra ran to the side of the room and looked out through the glass walls at the scene far below. Thousands and tens of thousands of robots were marching steadily toward the conical tower. From all directions they came, marching in that queer strained, not quite stiff way of theirs. And on they came, crowding on each other's heels, millions of them, coming at the bidding and command of her own robot slave, Q9T9.

For the first time she noticed the man on the rack. She went over and released his bonds.

When he had rubbed his arms and legs and restored their circulation, Tarra took him over to look down on the sight in the area around the conical tower. Millions of robots were now there, milling around, waiting for further command from Q9T9.

She pointed down. "And like a fool, I gave control of the robot army to my personal robot, Q9T9. He has used me to get the rule of the world himself. You've got to help me get out of this."

The huge man beside her smiled wryly. "A while ago you spoke of torturing me. Now you beg my help Why should I help?"

Tarra drew herself to her full height and looked Herrick full in the eyes. But before she could speak, he seized her by the shoulders and held her firmly at arm's length from him.

"When you were in the saddle," he said to her, his lips narrowing into a fine line, "it was all right for you to kill off thousands of poor, weak human beings. That satisfied your hunger for power and your appetite for cruelty. But now, when your own life is in danger, you beg me to help you, to save you.

"Listen closely," he rumbled from deep in his beard, "I've waited for this moment ever since that day in the park when you broke old Doctor Netherstone's heart. You got yourself into this mess—now get yourself out of it!"

CHAPTER VI

The Crusaders' Battle Axe

TARRA said not a word as she recoiled back from the vehemence of the young scientist's accusation. Further and further she shrank back into herself. All the months of rule and power began to dissolve into a mist as though it had never happened. All the urging in her body for ruthless rule lost itself in a realization that she was in love with this strange, powerful, man who had the peaceful eyes of Jol Herrick but the voice and body of a Viking god. This man suddenly became more important to her than anything she had ever known before, more important even than the death that waited for her outside the door.

Without realizing quite what she was doing, she threw her arms around Herrick's neck and pressed her lips to his.

"If you won't help me to live," she cried, "then help me to die."

Herrick pushed her away from him with violence.

The girl threw herself at his feet. "This room is filled with instruments of torture weapons of death and of warfare out of the ancient days," Tarra sobbed. "Choose any of them and kill me. That is all I deserve."

Herrick stepped back away from her just as a heavy thud sounded at the great golden doors. He looked at the doors and then around at the haphazard collection of ancient relics that filled the room.

Disregarding the girl completely, he walked around picking up a device here and there. A huge battle axe dating from the 13th century crusade made his eyes light with pleasure as he swung it in a half arc about his head. Another queer metal object drew his attention. He held it awkwardly in his hands, examining it carefully. Touching a certain spot, he was startled when the device roared into action and he saw a row of neat round holes appear in the wood rack across the room. He looked at it closer.

He picked up another object. Aiming it away from himself, he touched a series of knobs and levers and suddenly an electric flame shot forth. This, too, he knew was a weapon of ancient times.

Tarra, from her place on the floor, watched the man go from object to object. Finally he turned and came toward her.

"What chance have we if they break down the doors?" he asked her.

Tarra shook her head. "Our only hope is to get back up to the tower room where Q9T9 is. When I gave him power over the will-controls of the robots, I retained my power over his will-control and I forbade him from leaving that room. As long as he can keep me from him, he is master of the robots. If we can win our way to him, I can get back the will-controls over the robots."

HERRICK looked at her and smiled. "For the first time in my life I face a fight. And I find I like the idea. If I must die, I want to die fighting. And with these strange weapons . . . perhaps we may win."

At that instant, the girl screamed as the gold doors crashed in and robots tumbled into the room.

"Stay close behind me," Herrick ordered, and he swung around to face the oncoming robots.

With a roar of joy, he pressed the trigger on the machine gun and sent a whiplash of bullets that cut down the front ranks of the mechanical beings. It

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was chaos at once—with those that were shot down still trying to advance although their lower propelling mechanisms had failed. It was like legless men trying to walk. And behind them pushed hordes more of robots, blindly advancing on the couple in the room.

But soon the sheer weight of the metal robots themselves, pushing forward on the front immobile ranks, began to crush those in front and in the middle. There was a steady crunch of breaking metal as the mechanical beings kept pushing forward hopelessly against those in front, even before the machine gun was empty and had to be thrown aside.

Tarra smiled up at Herrick as he turned to look at her. "Rather horrible, isn't it?" she said.

Herrick looked across the mass of metal robots, and the girl could see him grinning to himself.

"If we get up on top that table over there," he said to her, "we can jump over on to the bodies of the robots and walk on top of them as far as the elevators. The central cage is empty, I can see."

Tarra and Herrick leaped lightly to the table top. But before climbing out over the sea of robots that stretched before them to the doors, Herrick picked up the battle axe and the electric flame thrower. With these under his arm, he helped Tarra in jumping from one robot head to the next, like crossing a brook on small stones.

Once in the gold elevator, the two breathed easier. Up they shot to the apex of Tarra's conical palace.

"If I can but come face to face with Q9T9, he will have to obey me," Tarra stated. "He is under my will-control the moment I face him."

As the elevator stopped and the doors slid quietly open, Herrick stood firm, his flame thrower ready.

Tarra screamed as a score of robots came rushing into the small cage, giving the two no chance to get out into the room beyond. With the fighting instinct of a cornered animal, Herrick let loose the jet of flame from the flame throwing machine.

There was a sudden flash and the robot directly in front of Herrick sank to his knees and fell forward. As his head slipped by Herrick, the metal seared a path across his arm—the robot's head was red hot!

Again the flame roared forth with the force of a bolt of lightning, and again, and again. And each time, a robot fell, his metal mechanisms fused together in the terrific heat of the electric flame.

Then, suddenly, the flame throwing machine was dead . . . useless. And in that same instant, before the rest of the robots could corner them in the cage, the two leaped out into the room.

TARRA shrank back behind Herrick as she saw the remaining half dozen robots advancing on them —coldly, unemotionally, ruthlessly, obeying a command they had no capacity to disobey.

She saw Herrick hunch his powerful shoulders in eagerness. Then she watched as he leaped forward, the great huge battle axe swinging in a vast circle over his head. And she heard his cry of joy as the axe crunched deep into the metal brain pan of the first robot.

From behind him, she watched the fierce battle that ensued. Once the robots had Herrick almost surrounded and were coming at him from all sides. But the next instant he swung the axe low, like some ancient Crusader cutting a swathe through the lines of the Saracens. With the last swing of the great two bladed axe, Herrick brought down one of the two remaining robots, but the ancient shaft broke in his hands.

The last robot came unswerving toward Herrick and the huge man spread his legs apart to meet the rush of the other. With his bare hands, he seized the robot and bent it over. The muscles on his back and arms stood out as he struggled with the metal being, but gradually inch by inch, the robot began to bend, the metal plates cracking under the terrific strain. When Herrick stood erect, he turned and faced Tarra, blood flowing from a dozen or more wounds. A smile was on his lips.

"I never knew what joy it is to fight," he said.

Then the two humans, remembering what they had come for, stepped around the elevator shaft and approached the gold desk at which Q9T9 was standing.

"Order the robots to halt where they are," commanded Tarra, facing the robot.

Stiffly Q9T9 bowed and gave the order. The dull thunder of moving robots below ceased and all became quiet.

"Now disconnect your metal brain," Tarra went on relentlessly.

The robot's hands moved to obey.

"No!" snapped Herrick suddenly. "Tell him to stop."

With a question in her eyes Tarra obeyed, turning to Herrick in puzzlement. He met her gaze levelly.

"Tell him to give me absolute control of the robots," he demanded.

For an instant Tarra stared, then obediently she gave the command. "I am yours to rule as you will," she murmured softly, "and to prove it I surrender also the will-control of Q9T9."

With a gleaming exultance in his eyes, Herrick snatched her to him and planted a kiss on her lips. Then he strode to the instrument panel, threw the switch and spoke with firm decision.

"Robots of Shago, *all of you*, disconnect your brain controls!"

Beside him, Q9T9's metallic arms obeyed, in company with every other robot in Shago. As the last wire was severed, his metal body crashed to the floor, a limp heap of cold metal. From the floors below, and from the street outside, came a great crash of collapsing metal bodies, then silence; silence that was not disturbed.

"The new Adam and Eve will need no robots," said Herrick masterfully as he took Tarra into his arms.

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GOLDEN GIRL OF

CHAPTER I
The Golden Girl

JOHN KALEN sat alone, slowly sipping his brandy. Once he looked around when he heard the word *"Kalen"* in a hoarse whisper. But it was not repeated. He shrugged and motioned to his waiter for another bottle.

The evening wore on. John sipped comfortably, kept aglow by alcohol fumes which affected him peculiarly in combination with the music. The feeling, that events impended, crawled through his brain persistently; he was here for some definite reason. What reason?

He sunk into a lethargic reverie, but was none the less conscious of his surroundings. Gradually he became aware that someone occupied the chair across the table from him. Someone *different*—striking!

"John Kalen," the voice was low, soft, musical The gears clicked in his brain. A tiny beam of recollection flashed, but faded before he caught its meaning His eyes focused slowly on the golden girl across the table.

She *was* a golden girl. Her skin, though creamy white, seemed to shed a glowing, golden emanation, as if—or did he imagine it?—as if it were radio-active!

The whole room faded from his mind and he saw only the girl. Her slim, graceful body leaned forward slightly above the table. Her lips were parted just a bit. Her hair was spun gold, twined about her head like the halo of an exotic goddess. Her arms, resting lightly on the table-top, had been modeled by the master sculptor of all beauty.

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KALENDAR

By F. ORLIN TREMAINE

Who was this golden girl whose body glowed with radium, whose touch was certain death?

"John Kalen," she said, "you are here at the appointed time. Everything is ready."

Kalen was more than sober now. His eyes searched hers closely but found no telltale signs of the adventuress. She was a mystery—and yet somehow she knew of him! Had he been drunk enough—? No. There were no blank spaces of memory to be accounted for.

His mind raced. She knew something he did not know. He must learn what it was.

"Ready?" He asked, puzzled. The radio-active emanation from her skin bothered his eyes. He could not look steadily at her. It was like heat waves over a summer field; wavering all about her body. They hovered even outside the shimmering white silk of her shirtwaist.

When he glanced away from her, his eyes registered nothing. She had filled his entire conscious mind in an instant, and his eyes acted as if he had been staring at the sun. She had come—and eyes and thoughts had room for nothing else.

"I am *Jalu,*" she said, smiling as if that explained everything.

"So?" John tried to lead her on. A little frown puckered her brow.

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"The boat is waiting," she continued after a moment's hesitation, "It is stocked and fueled. The crew is aboard. They expect you tonight. Have you the money?"

John Kalen's mind raced feverishly. *Was* he mistaken? Was this impression of her radio-active skin merely alcohol fumes in his brain?

"NO."

THE NEGATION impinged itself on his consciousness like a physical blow. The influence, which had guided him gently thus far, became a driving force, killing any doubt concerning her. That one word "NO" had seemed to come from within his brain —yet he could have sworn he heard it, too!

He heard his own voice, as if it were far in the distance, ask softly:

"What boat, Jalu?" As if the use of her strange name were habitual, and commonplace.

Her eyes widened incredulously.

"Why, the *Mary Ann.*"

His father's auxiliary-motored schooner! The lawyers had mentioned it. He knew it existed. He heard Jalu's voice again.

"You have the money?"

Now if John Kalen hadn't been safely and suddenly a millionaire he wouldn't have been here. And if he hadn't been a millionaire he wouldn't have admitted having the money that was in his pocket. He wasn't a complete fool. He thought quickly of the risks involved, and again he heard his own voice answering, calmly, clearly—before he planned to speak:

"I have seven thousand dollars."

"That is right," Jalu answered matter-of-factly. "Then we are ready."

JOHN KALEN had been drunk for a week or it wouldn't have happened. If it had happened to anyone else, it wouldn't have mattered.

A certain combination opens a safe. By the same token it required an exact combination of characters, circumstances, and events to unlock one of the strangest mysteries ever overlooked by archeological-minded historians.

First of all, Kalen had to be a millionaire. He was. Second, if he had made the money himself he would have been off somewhere working to keep it. But he didn't make it. His father, Jacob Kalen—*Captain* Jacob Kalen—had willed it to him; in gold bars in the safe deposit vaults of a New York bank. John had converted the bars into cash within twenty-four hours after he received his legacy.

John Kalen had seen his father twice that he could remember. Both times they had visited for an hour at the military school where John had spent the six years between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

During his four years at college, John had received exactly three letters in lieu of calls!

Those three letters were three successive promises to reveal a strange and proud heritage upon John's graduation from college.

Instead, three weeks before his final examinations, had come a cryptic note from the attorneys who sent his allowance and reported his escapades. It told of his father's death at sea, of the will which left everything to John Kalen, and of the necessity for him to obtain his degree, and then come direct to New York and call upon said attorneys.

Four weeks had passed since that date. All conditions had been fulfilled. John Kalen was on his own. He knew nothing about himself or his people. He had $1,603,400.00 in the bank, and $7,000.00 in his pocket!

A PROGRESSIVE attempt to drown his sense of futility, of fear, and a hint of sorrow, had started on upper Broadway with a group of boys from college.

But they had all left John after that first night, while he kept on drinking his way downtown. The second night he had gone his way alone. The fifth night found him along the waterfront.

He had been attracted to the docks as if drawn by a magnet. His feet had borne him straight (if a little unsteadily) to a certain dim entrance; down three steps, and across the room to a specific table. He moved like an automaton; as if habit had trained him to a definite path so that his senses functioned when his knowledge failed.

It was not of his own conscious choice or volition that he had sought out the one spot on the whole street which was frequented chiefly by Hindus, Egyptians, and Latins of the more mystic type, sailors who talked of history as well as grog.

The walls of the room were hung with smoke-begrimed oriental tapestries. Three barelegged musicians squatted on a tiny platform in one corner, coaxing weird music from some instruments made apparently from bamboo. Figures moved back and forth to the bar. Waiters, all of an oriental caste, slithered about among the tables, inconspicuously.

John was young. He had starved for adventure, dreamed of it. There had been strange stirrings in his blood through the long years of school. He had devoured astronomy, touring the universe in his mind. His space ships had been telescopes but they had built a craving. And here within his grasp was a *golden girl,* luring him aboard his own ship! Toward what adventures he could not guess.

She started to rise, but sat down again when he made no move.

"My clothes. My hotel. The lawyers." He spoke half to himself.

"Your clothes are aboard. Also your new outfits for shipboard and the tropics, also the *Drezza* wear. "Your hotel is paid. Your lawyers were informed."

He looked at her dazedly. "When?"

"Yesterday, John Kalen," she answered slowly. "Drezza wear?" he repeated uncertainly.

"Of course! You will need it before we reach the end of the Moon Trail."

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He leaned across the table toward her, but a startled look came into her eyes and she leaned back quickly.

"No! No!" she said, as sharply as her soft tones permitted. "Not yet! You must not come close. My touch would be death until after you have passed through the shower spray."

John looked unconvinced for an instant. But he had felt a strange, tingling sensation in his lower legs for some minutes, and they had been closest to her, under the table. Radio-active! She *was* radio-active!

"You're not—human, Jalu?" he asked hesitantly.

Jalu laughed, a tinkling laugh, like bells across the water. She was ethereal in her beauty, exquisite, more perfect than a woman had a right to be!

"Human? Yes, John, perhaps too human! I like you."

Jalu's head tilted back as she laughed again. John caught his breath at the maddening beauty of her skin, the curve of her neck and throat. His eyes feasted on her glory despite that wavering, golden emanation which surrounded her.

Her white silk waist was open in a V at her throat. As she leaned forward again, his eye caught a bit of color on her skin, revealed as her body turned slightly. He glanced away to ease his eyes, then back again. It was still there as she cupped her chin in her hands, smiling across at him.

"You," he said, nodding downward toward her breast, "are tattooed, Jalu?"

She glanced down, then up again, adjusting her waist, the twinkle in her eyes still alive.

"It's the token," she said, smiling again, as if that explained everything. "Shall we go now? You mustn't come within a yard of me. It isn't safe."

And John Kalen made the break as he had felt he would. The *influence*, though passive, still guided his thoughts. And he wanted adventure!

And the *Mary Ann* was his own property!

And *Jalu* was a very desirable mystery!

"All right," he said. "I'm ready."

CHAPTER II

The Good Ship "Mary Ann"

THE *Mary Ann* loomed, a gaunt skeleton in the darkness, before John Kalen's unaccustomed eyes. He could hear the suck and push of the swell as it lapped against the planking on the dock. The ship moved slightly, enough to make her seem alive. He could see stars winking through the rigging. There was no moon.

Only Jalu was clearly visible. The golden emanations of her body brought every curve and every feature into bold relief, like a human firefly. He could see that she was smiling at him—yet he knew *his* face must be only an indistinct blur in the shadows.

For just an instant he hesitated, was tempted to bolt. Events were sweeping him out to sea. This strange, alluring golden girl was taking him into the unknown! He felt smothered. Then he laughed, uncertainly. The *Mary Ann* was his own property. The unknown world he feared was the world his father had known and loved.

"Shall we go aboard?" Jalu's voice almost caressed him with its soft magic.

"Of course." For the third time that evening he heard his own voice answer, as if he, himself, had nothing to do with the decision.

"Come then." Jalu emitted a low, birdlike, whistling note, and the schooner came suddenly to life.

Lights splashed long yellow fingers along the deck. Long beams shot out from unsuspected portholes. The sound of running feet sounded from every quarter of the boat. A section of rail swung back and a gangplank slid to the pier at John's feet. A light played down to show the way aboard.

Jalu, her halo faded now in the glare of light, nodded for John Kalen to lead the way.

On deck two men in officer's uniforms stood at salute. They stood straight and tall, with muscles bulging under trim uniforms, as if they were playing a part but must not be examined too closely. John was keenly conscious of the fact that their bodies shed that same radio-active emanation which had made Jalu seem other than human. His arm raised in salute; he didn't raise it, it raised! The men relaxed.

Jalu passed him quickly. She nodded her head to the officers as she said:

"Let me show you to your cabin, John Kalen." And the pause between her enunciation of his first and last names sent a thrill of wonder chasing up and down his spine. That pause had made the word "Kalen" sound like a title, spoken reverently; more than that, as she spoke his last name it seemed to John that Jalu had bent her knees and bowed her head almost imperceptibly.

John was unconscious of his feet or his course as he followed his golden guide aft. Jalu stepped aside at the door of a roomy cabin, fitted in mahogany and gleaming brass. She bowed again.

"You will find everything in order, John Kalen," she said. "You are tired. Michael will attend you. Good-night."

The door closed behind him. John was alone. His eyes wanted to close. Like a runner exhausted after a long race, he sank into a chair. The reaction, after a week of sleepless roistering, the effect of watching a wavering golden halo for two hours, had been hypnotic. His eyelids drooped, his head sank forward. John Kalen slept.

The cabin door opened. A soft-footed Irishman, with eyes that twinkled like stars over Killarney, moved silently about arranging the bed, dimming the light, and finally holding a glass to the sleeper's lips. John drank it without even rousing enough to open his eyes.

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JOHN KALEN awoke to the feel of motion. He lay wide-eyed, puzzling at his surroundings. Sunlight streamed into the room from a window above his bed. His eyes roved over the mahogany paneled walls, the gleaming yellow metal trim. His momentary panic vanished as he recalled the unbelievable events of the night before. He had come aboard his own ship voluntarily, had been shown to his cabin.

He did not remember coming to bed, yet here he was, in silk pajamas of a finer texture than any he had ever seen. His clothes were gone, but in their place a uniform, with captain's insignia, rested across a chair —the chair into which he had dropped to fall asleep!

From the slant of the sunlight across the cabin, John knew that it was early, yet he felt perfectly rested. His senses were keen. He wanted to jump up and examine this ship of his from stem to stern. But some tiny spark of wisdom bade him wait.

The roll of the ship told him he was on the open sea. He inhaled deep lungfuls of the salt air which whipped about the cabin. He heard the creak and strain of the rigging as it held in the fresh breeze. He could feel the ship driving through a rolling sea; could hear the lapping of the waves against her side. A surge of eager life came into his rested muscles, and he started to hum a tune in time with the vessel's roll.

The door opened silently and footsteps sounded in the room. The door clicked shut. His nostrils keened to the steaming aroma of hot food He was hungry; desperately hungry! A voice which held some tiny vestige of a brogue made him turn his eyes at last.

"Your breakfast is ready, sir. Will you have it in bed?"

John's eyes were searching as he looked at the smiling, chubby Irishman beside him.

"You are Michael?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you can come near me without danger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let me have it, quick. I'm hungry, and I want to talk to you."

"Yes, sir." Michael arranged the pillows and set a little table on the bed so quickly that John knew he understood. And as fast as he ate, new dishes were set before him. Strawberries with cream, steaming oatmeal, bacon and eggs, toast and coffee.

The pangs of hunger effectively prevented speech until he had finished the last bite and lay back against the pillows, smiling.

"That was a breakfast fit for a king, Michael," John said, but his brow wrinkled at the startled expression on Michael's face.

The man gulped, reddened, then quickly cleared the dishes and table away.

"Yes, sir," he said at last, and then, "Do you wish to dress, sir?"

It suddenly occurred to John that fear had not entered his head since he wakened. There had been wonder. He had been curious at the ship's motion, but not dissatisfied. And yet—in calm retrospect—this might be a very clever kidnaping!

With a quick motion he threw back the covers and swung his legs over the side of the bed. His feet landed on velvet slippers, and Michael was putting them on his feet all in an instant. His eyes noted a little heap of trinkets on the massive bureau; his wallet and the contents of his pockets.

John crossed the room, on legs not yet steadied to the sea, and counted the money. It was all there. Suddenly he began to hum again. He doffed his pajamas and donned the underwear and socks which waited on the chair. While Michael adjusted his garters he asked:

"Why the captain's uniform, Michael?" The question sounded reasonable enough to John, but Michael seemed to gather a different meaning than he intended.

"It's the highest rank at sea, sir. Aboard you are the captain."

"Hm-m-m-m," John puzzled over this; asked lightly, "And do I have Master's papers?"

Michael didn't see his smile, for it disappeared at the unexpected answer.

"Oh, yes sir, that is all attended to. Your papers are in order."

Thoughtful now, John donned the perfectly fitting, well-tailored uniform. He caught his reflection in the mirror and began to hum again. Life was good even if he didn't know what it was all about. It was making up in a rush for the long years of lonely boyhood —or was it? He stopped humming as doubt assailed him. The only thing he knew about the laws of the sea—was that the captain always sticks to his ship. He hoped the mate was a good sailor. He hoped— Then he grinned and started to hum again. He cut a trim figure in his blues. The cap rested jauntily above his chestnut hair. His shoulders squared.

"Shall we go on deck, Michael?"

"Whenever you're ready, sir."

"By the way, Michael, what time is it? How long have we been at sea?"

"It's eight o'clock, sir, land time. We lifted anchor as soon as you were asleep. We've been at sea about thirty hours. And now, sir, if you're ready, the crew has been standing for review since six-thirty."

John Kalen's jaw dropped. Thirty hours at sea! He'd slept the clock around and more! Review! He was in a daze, but he laughed If this was a joke he could carry it off,—but it couldn't be a joke—it was his own ship! Michael opened the door and John stepped out into the wind-driven sunlight.

He was the captain of his father's—no, his *own* ship!

The crew had been lined up, waiting for nearly two hours, for him to pass by!

Michael had seemed to apologize, saying that the captain's rank was highest at sea!

Thirty hours out of New York! Had they given him a sleeping potion? And if so, how and when?

Walking slowly, conscious of Michael at his elbow, John paced along the deck, eyeing the men keenly.

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Thirty-seven of them—a terrific number for a schooner! And every man-jack of them glowed with that same radio-active emanation which had surrounded Jalu! Where was Jalu? If he'd been tricked—

"Fine," he said to the mate as he reached the end of the long line, and then, because he felt as if that were inadequate, "What speed are we making?"

"Eleven knots, John Kalen," was the answer, "and thank you, sir."

CHAPTER III

If You Value My Life!

SIX weeks out of New York, the *Mary Ann* still plowed ahead under fair winds. John Kalen rested beneath an awning on the afterdeck. He was hard, brown, and curiously happy. His fears of what lay ahead had long since died. There had been hours of walking, of handball with Michael, and later with Jalu.

During the first week he had not glimpsed the golden girl although he had watched for her everywhere. He had been forced to eat alone. Otherwise every slightest request had been obeyed quickly and eagerly. He was still mystified and a little uncertain, but he thrilled to the feel of his own ship beneath his feet.

And Jalu was on his mind. She had brought him aboard, then deserted him.

"Michael," he had said at last, "where is Jalu?"

"In her cabin, sir."

"I should like to see her."

"Yes, sir." Michael had sped away. Inside of two minutes he was back again, saying:

"The princess—"

But Jalu's voice had interrupted:

"You wished to see me, John Kalen?"

After that he had Jalu for company. And so, now, as he rested on the afterdeck, Jalu reclined opposite him. She had been companion, mentor and playfellow. He had questioned her as they walked side by side on their daily laps around the deck—always a yard apart—had questioned her while they played ping-pong; had watched her until her witchery almost drove him mad.

And she had evaded his questions neatly, parried them adroitly, squirmed out of his most purposeful inquisitions courteously.

All John knew now, after six weeks at sea on his own ship, was that they were headed for the *Moon Trail*. And he hadn't the faintest idea where that was or where it led!

Today, he knew, the ship approached some obscure point on the coast of South America; that it was to be put in drydock for repairs that would take many months; and then was to be held until called for!

The semi-tropic sun threw hot, breathless air against the protective awning under which John Kalen and Jalu lounged at ease.

"Jalu," he said, "tell me something, anything, about our destination. I came without question but—tell me."

And Jalu shook her golden head.

"I'm sorry, John Kalen," she almost whispered. "Your father forbade it. When we arrive you will know—everything."

JOHN searched her eyes as best he could despite her glowing halo. Then he laughed.

"All right, then, tell me about yourself. Is that forbidden?"

"What is it you wish to know, John Kalen?"

"Your parents. Where are they?"

"You will meet them at the end of the *Moon Trail*."

"Has my father been there?"

"He—lived—there." She answered softly.

"And when will we arrive at the end of the *Moon Trail?*"

"In February."

"H-m-m-m. And this is August. Well—"

"It is a long, hard journey, John Kalen."

John grimaced. Adventure was coming, evidently. He turned sidewise, toward his companion.

"And you, Princess Jalu—"

Jalu gasped. Her hand flew to her breast.

"You—you know—?"

He noted the gesture of consternation and his eyes twinkled.

"Not much. When Michael first brought you on deck he called you princess before you interrupted him."

She looked relieved, but her face was deathly pale.

"Please, John Kalen, if my life is of any value to you at all, don't ever mention that you even heard that word. The secrecy is a sacred trust. Even the slightest breach would mean death."

John looked at her searchingly. She meant every word. He stirred uneasily. "What kind of a mess am I in on my own ship?" he asked as much of himself as of her.

"No mess, John Kalen," she said quickly, "your life is your own, and," she added under her breath, "so many, many other lives!"

John frowned. Six weeks, and the mystery was becoming maddening. He commanded and they obeyed. They hinted at power which was his, yet he was still ignorant of his objective. It never occurred to him to make a test of the hinted power!

"Land Ho!" Like an echo of thought, the cry floated down from the masthead. John saw the mate come out on the bridge and raise a telescope.

"Where away?"

"Dead ahead."

With a start John realized for the first time that it was strange these radio-active creatures spoke English. He glanced at Jalu, but turned away silent. He'd figure these things out in his own way. A short nap would not be amiss, he thought, and with the

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perverse lassitude of the tropics he closed his eyes.

John Kalen had been tempered to sundrenched steel. He had been put through a six weeks training period without realizing that the trip might have been made much faster. Jalu tiptoed from under the canopy and walked forward to meet the mate. For a moment the two stood close together.

"The Kalen?" the mate said, and she spoke over her shoulder.

"He sleeps."

"It is well." The officer nodded and once again focused his telescope. Jalu continued on toward her cabin.

CHAPTER IV

The Moon Trail

THERE had been a full month in port. The ship was in drydock. Supplies were purchased and John had paid the bill. Now for four and a half months they had trekked an armed caravan, on their leisurely way through deepening jungles on a blazed trail which could not from its appearance have been traveled within a year.

Several times there had been friendly talks with Indians. Once an escort of two hundred warriors had accompanied them for eighty miles through hostile country.

There had been hunts, for meat, with enough adventures on the side to fill a book. Three members of the party had been buried along the trail: One was gored to death by some strange horned beast (which had died even as it gored); another had keeled over with a poison dart sticking from his neck, not ten feet from John Kalen. The third had been snatched from the very water's edge by a crocodile, during a river crossing. And the crocodile had been floating on the surface, belly upward within a minute!

And after each accident, the guard closest to John had been doubled. He was forced to ride on a covered tractor in the hostile stretches, but since Jalu rode with him he made no protest. There were three tractors, hauling trailers loaded with supplies. These trailers were flatboats on wheels. At river crossings, the boats made three round trips each, one with the load of supplies, one with the tractor which hauled it, and the third with the animals and the rearguard.

On the fifteenth of January the company traversed a deep pass through the mountains, and came out on a sunny plain which stretched ahead for many miles. Camp was pitched, and Jalu approached timidly to where John stood glorying in the savage beauty of the country.

She stood silently until he turned.

"You here, Jalu?" he said. "Isn't it glorious?"

"We approach the *Moon Trail*, John Kalen," she said clearly, and curtseyed as she spoke his name.

He stared. There was no question this time. It was done openly and frankly. His impression that he had received furtive obeisances was confirmed.

"And—?" His brow was furrowed.

"It is time to don your Drezza wear," she seemed to hesitate at what she had to say, yet to feel impelled to say it, "You must be prepared for surprise and revelation. You must not show surprise or shock. We are approaching the shower spray. It is necessary for you to conform to the dress and custom. Please do not question." She curtseyed again and turned away.

John reached out a hand as if to stop her, then turned back deliberately to gaze again at the savage landscape. His brain was racing. He was approaching a climax. There had been six months of glorious adventure and intriguing mystery. It must lead somewhere. He was nearing the solution of the mystery of his father, of himself. He felt it. And he had been warned not to show shock or surprise! His heart beat a little faster as he turned his steps back toward the circle of tents, five minutes later.

But when John stepped inside the circle his breath caught in his throat. His eyes widened. Over his tent hung a silken tapestry emblazoned with an ornate heraldry. A lion predominated on the shield, and underneath was the one word, "*Kalen.*"

Not a man was in sight. There was no sound. He remembered Jalu's warning and walked slowly across the space between the tents. Long, slender shafts of golden light from the setting sun set up a gleaming latticework around the camp. Faroff sounded the call of some strange bird.

Michael was waiting for him, but a different Michael, dressed as an ancient might have been. Sandals with criss-crossed thongs reaching almost to his knees; a wide girdle of soft leather, bearing a knife and holster, about his waist. Around his shoulders was a strap harness from which was suspended a large leathern pouch which did not impede his movements yet was easily reached with either hand. And on his chest, its color peeping through the open harness, was the coat of arms John had seen emblazoned on the tapestry above the tent.

John had paused involuntarily while he noted the change in Michael, but he remembered Jalu's warning in time to bite his tongue and enter without comment. Neither did he remark at the rich furs strewn on the earthen floor in place of the grass matting which had served for the last six months. His brain was too dazed at the implications of the change to do more than bite his tongue again.

"Ready, sire?" Even Michael's form of address to him was different.

"Ready, Michael." The words were an effort. And as John answered, Michael kneeled and began to unlace his high shoes.

TEN minutes later John gazed at his reflection in the great mirror which had appeared at the back of the tent. His steel-blue eyes saw a strapping, bronzed, young savage. A finely wrought headdress

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of woven gold rested on his chestnut hair like a crown. The soft leather girdle about his waist was overlaid with golden cloth. His ornate sandals, and the thongs which wrapped his lower legs gleamed like precious metal. From his shoulders hung a gossamer thin tunic, so finely woven it hung like a satin robe, and only its glint of yellow told that it, too, was made of fine golden threads.

Gathering his courage, John stepped to the entrance —then stopped, frozen in his tracks. Every man in the camp was on his knees, head bowed, arms crossed on his chest, in a long row which reached most of the distance across the clearing. And at the end of the line was Jalu! Every one of them was dressed like Michael, except that Jalu's harness covered her breasts. And every one including Jalu wore the coat-of-arms tattooed, as Michael wore it!

"Jalu!" The word exploded from John's lips like a command. The girl raised her head, smiled, rose to her feet and came forward, taking her place two paces to the right of John Kalen.

Her lips moved in a whisper.

"Careful, John Kalen. As you name them, so their rank shall be throughout your lifetime."

John whispered in turn.

"Must I name them all now?"

She shook her head slightly. "No, later will do."

John was silent for a moment, then: "Orkus," he said, and the mate of his ship rose, came forward and took his place at Kalen's left.

"Rise." This last word was a blind guess. He had named a commander, and by luck, a princess. The men rose.

"You may go," he said, and they turned away, smiling. Jalu and Orkus turned to him. Orkus spoke.

"They are pleased, my Kalen," he said, "and I thank you humbly for maintaining Jalu's rank, and my own."

The transformed caravan approached the tallest mountain. For two days the quality of exhilaration which filled the air had more than offset the increasing altitude. And the third night, Jalu curtseyed and said:

"In another day we reach the shower-spray, John Kalen. There is danger, but we shall win through. If you permit I will stay close to you after we pass it."

John stiffened. His eyes flashed.

"Danger?" He said. "That word is magic. Of course you shall stay close to me, both after and *before* we reach the spray."

Orkus set a heavy guard around the camp. The tractors formed the points of a triangle about his tent, and machine guns appeared like magic mounted on the top of each tractor. Two men were on duty at each gun.

The tents formed a large circle with John's in the center.

"Michael," he said, noting the precautions, "tell Jalu she is to stay in my tent tonight."

John turned then and sought out Orkus who was setting up brush barriers around the camp. Fires blazed brightly outside the barriers as the cooks struggled to prepare the evening meal before darkness made the fires too conspicuous.

"The party is over?" John asked gazing about. Orkus, startled, turned to him.

"The party is over, John Kalen," he said, saluting, "the renegades will fight to keep us out."

John did not question him. He simply wondered the more at what lay ahead.

"I am having Jalu stay in my tent tonight," John informed him. Orkus looked relieved.

"Thank you, John Kalen. We are thankful." It was a heartfelt tribute to royalty, and John knew that in that instant he had made a friend.

CHAPTER V

Into the Shower Spray

THE RATTLE of machine gun fire awoke John Kalen. Staccato sounds that pierced through into his conscious mind like needle pricks. He sat up, confused, and gazed about him in the pitch blackness of his tent.

As awareness returned he heard, over the rattle of gunfire, a soft voice calling his name.

"Kalen," it said, "John Kalen."

He shook his head to clear it. That sounded like Jalu. And then he remembered. There had been danger. She had stayed in his tent for safety.

"Yes?" He answered, suddenly wide awake and leaping to his feet.

"Stay down, John Kalen." Jalu said. "There is deadly danger."

But John Kalen was dashing out of his tent before the words had left her mouth. He was a striking figure as he stood watching the shadowy figures which struggled to cross the brush barriers around the camp. His passive role was ended.

"Break out the searchlights," he said tersely, "and fire the brush. Then aim to kill."

Orkus passed the order to the men without question and in an instant flaming firebrands sailed through the air and landed in the brush-heaps.

John saw one of his defenders cease to move and snatched up the discarded rifle as the barriers burst into crackling flame. As the brush flared up the attackers were thrown into bold relief and he poured shot after shot at their weaving forms.

The rifle fire of the defenders became deadly even before the three great searchlights threw questing fingers of light across the sand. And all the time the three machine guns kept up their ceaseless chatter.

Within ten minutes the attacking figures melted away in the darkness. Standing beside Orkus, John inclined his head and heard the sound of panic-driven feet far-off and going farther and farther, across the plains.

"Orkus," John Kalen's voice was sharp, "prepare

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to move under forced march. If a new attack is planned they will come here first."

"Yes, sire." Orkus saluted, and for the second time that night relayed John's orders without question. It seemed to Kalen that instantly tents began to drop.

"How many did we lose?" John asked softly.

"Seven, sire."

"I heard no opposing rifles."

"No, sire, poison darts."

John strode resolutely to the crackling brush, whose slowly dying flames cast eerie shadows. He gazed at the still forms outside the barriers. Dozens, yes scores of them! Too many to count. He felt a little sick at the thought of slaughter.

Bronzed, athletic figures they seemed, too. He stood, in an awful fascination at the sight. Then in a sudden flareup of the firelight he saw a face, and something like a childhood nightmare gripped him in talons of unconquerable fear. It was bestial, satanic! There was something hypnotic in the gaze of the wide, staring eyes. He dragged his own eyes away and looked at another face, and another. There was no difference. Every one of them held that same, bestial demoniac expression. He closed his eyes and gargoyle features still leered at him, with evil-sated hypnotic power.

He stumbled back toward the champ, shuddering at what they had escaped. And with a mighty effort he drew himself together.

"The wounded, Orkus?" he asked, but his voice trembled as he spoke.

"There are no wounded, sire. All are untouched—or dead."

It was a simple statement. John's observations had confirmed it but his mind could not encompass the idea. It seemed reasonable for the defenders, facing poison darts, but—

"Out there?"

Orkus replied gravely, "Our bullets have been dipped in the poison, sire."

A wave of nausea swept over John Kalen at the answer. He turned away. Perhaps it was just as merciful—but something inside him squirmed. Adventure was assuming new and horrible form.

He watched the men moving about like firedemons, casting grotesque shadows. Even the tents and equipment assumed strange shapes and leering grins. Hobgoblins reached out talon hands, and gargoyle faces bobbed about him in the half-light of the sinking fires.

For one soul-paralyzing minute, John probed the depths of nightmare panic. His skin crawled in abject fear of the unknown. His eyes darted like those of a cornered, hunted thing. Unutterable horror was dragging him closer and closer to the brink of madness.

"John Kalen." Jalu's soft voice caressed him as it had caressed him six months before in a cafe on the New York waterfront. He had been spellbound then; now he wanted to cling to her and sob!

The staccato bursts of the motors announced that the caravan was ready—but still he stood frozen by that nameless fear. He made a slight gesture toward the golden girl, but she shook her head.

"Not yet, John Kalen. If we march all night we'll reach the shower spray by noon. After that you can approach me normally. Now is the bad time. The breath of *Erzpa** is in the air."

John's eyes gazed at her unchanging. They were almost glassy from the torturing strain, but her voice continued, and he felt it and responded.

"The shower spray makes one immune, but until we reach it you must be strong, John Kalen. Michael we had to bind. He was burned by the contact with our bodies," Jalu's voice was soothing, melodious, hypnotic, "But you are strong."

A stray breeze stirred the air. John's eyes cleared slowly and the insane glare left them. For the first time since he had sat in that waterfront cafe he felt that tremendous unknown *influence*, forcing his thoughts, impinging itself on his mind.

His voice spoke to Jalu: "I am all right now."

And Jalu turned away to hide the tears that welled up in her eyes.

"Oh, I'm so glad for you, John—and for me," she said. But the last three words were to herself alone.

John's heart gave a great bound. He visioned an ecstasy which waited. He knew now why he had boarded the *Mary Ann*. Jalu, in her emotion, had forgotten to call him "Kalen"; had forgotten to curtsey!

THERE had been unrest among the animals. Three of the horses had been killed by poison darts during the attack. The eyes of those which still lived were rimmed in red, as if they too had suffered from the strange breath of the *Erzpa*.

The pack mules and burrows seemed not to have been affected.

John mounted his tractor and the caravan started instantly on its slow journey across the plains. Two long files of men, one on either side of the tractors, walked steadily, alertly, with rifles loaded and ready. The machine guns were still mounted in position to fire. But now as the company neared its goal, its number totaled only thirty including Jalu and John Kalen.

It was a huge, red desert sun that rose on the plodding column. The day grew hot and the air breathless, but they kept on. The smell of hot oil and rubber mingled with the fumes of the exhaust from the three

*Erzpa is the native name for a species of plant *(nicotine gentian)* which flourishes in a prescribed area of not more than 300 square miles of plain outside of Kalendar. Its so-called "breath" is a pollen so fine that it floats in the air with the slightest breeze.

Any person not immunized through the radio-active therapy of the shower spray, is allergic to this pernicious pellagra.

The pollen, inhaled, attacks the sinus sac in a violent manner leading to temporary insanity. Continued exposure brings about a permanent obsessive insanity; a form of dementia praecox which leads its victims to unite in seeking the destruction of any living man or woman not so afflicted.

The so-called "outer renegades" are comprised of men who have strayed inside the deadly area of the Erzpa pollinated air. There is little doubt that many of the missing exploration parties of the last five decades are among these insane.

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motors. The sand scorched the feet of the marching men through their leather sandals.

Two cooks passed cubes of cheese and slices of bread to the passing men, and they ate, walking. Later they passed down the files with canteens of lukewarm water.

It was a cruel march, but John made no pretense of taking part in it. He rode; they walked. But he did not change his orders in the slightest degree, except to allow substitutions for the tractor drivers and machine gunners. And this was poor respite on the desertlike plain.

It was as if John Kalen had withdrawn and another rode in his place. His mind felt that impinging force of a great will which directed his brain, urging him to drive the men on.

Yet all through the heat of the morning hours the air grew more and more exhilarating. It was buoyant by the time they saw the sun reaching toward the meridian.

At eleven o'clock they could discern trees in the distance, at the base of what appeared to be unscalable mountains. The peaks which they had traversed on the journey had been hard and tall, but these were lost in clouds and John could not even guess their height.

Then it came! Plopping down out of the air, a bleached skull rolled almost under the wide tread of the tractor. John's eyes followed it. He shuddered. He saw the men dart quick, nervous glances toward the plain which lay behind them.

"What does it mean, Jalu?" John nodded indolently toward the gruesome messenger.

"*Probably* that the renegades are waiting, sire, at the spray. *Surely*, that there is danger greater than we counted, for they have learned—" Her voice trailed off into silence. She was pale.

In the long minutes of silence that followed there remained the snorting drone of the motors, the smell of sweating mules,—and heat, aching, torturing heat. The air was wavering like the emanations from Jalu's body. Perspiration oozed from every pore in John's ill-protected skin. His eyes were glazing over. Glistening bodies, marching! Glistening sand, blinding sun—heat! And he, John Kalen, had ordered it so!

He laughed, suddenly, a harsh, strident laugh that brought Jalu's fear-ridden eyes jerking to his. Her lips moved, but the words were soft.

"John," she whispered appealingly, "John Kalen."

Still he laughed, horribly. His eyes were dilated, wild with the savage wildness that knows no reason. Jalu bit her lip. Her hand reached out and touched his arm lightly. He jumped, but the wildness left his eyes after a moment and he stopped laughing.

"A burn," he said, slowly, wonderingly, gazing at the purpling spot on his arm "and from the looks of it, a radium burn!"

"I'm sorry, John Kalen," Jalu said softly, "you were giving way again to the breath. It was the only thing I could do. That skull,—" She broke off her thought and added instead, "We'll be at the spray soon, and we need your strength."

There was a quiet like the stillness of death when the caravan halted at noon in the shadow of the trees. The air was heavy. The trees were gigantic. A river pounded out and away through a rocky gorge beside them. Orkus darted about placing the tractors and the guns. Tired men threw new dirt on ancient breastworks which formed a broken quarter circle from cliff to gorge.

JOHN sat on a pile of canvas, indolently. His system reacted drowsily after the nervous siege of the Erzpa and its violent cure. His arm ached from the purple burn in the shape of Jalu's hand.

Another skull dropped almost at his feet. Jalu, standing a few feet away, paled and turned toward him.

"It is time, John Kalen. We are here before them and will be ready. You need long hours in the spray. Come."

She moved toward the roar of the waterfall and John slowly got to his feet and followed her. He moved in the same indolent manner in which he had watched the feverish activity in the new camp.

The water burst in a torrent from the mountain itself. And where it crashed down on the rocks a purple spray rose and spread, and seemed to hover in the air. Straight back behind the roaring falls, Jalu led him, to a stone chair. The moisture of the spray which filled the air was like rich wine. It tingled against his skin, and eased the pain in his arm. All the colors of the spectrum danced through a shaft of sunlight which pierced the foliage. The roar of the water was like a lullaby, and John Kalen was tired.

Beside the chair was a couch carved also from the living rock. And on the couch was a mattress of some material that seemed impervious to the water.

"Must I stay back here?" he asked, yawning, scarcely conscious of the fact that he was behind the waterfall.

"Yes, John Kalen. You must stay here until the flow ceases. You will know, for the silence will awaken you. Then you will see the steps. When you see them, you must dress and mount them at once."

"Dress?" John forced his drooping lids upward and looked at Jalu in surprise.

"Yes, sire." Jalu glanced away. "You must undress before you sleep. Thus only will you get the full benefit of the spray. We will defend the camp, and will follow you up the steps ten minutes after the flow ceases. You will have time, and your privacy will not be disturbed."

John frowned perplexedly, but drowsiness was getting the best of him. Only one other question forced its way through his lips.

"What of Michael? Doesn't he need it?"

Jalu glanced down, "I'm sorry, John. Michael succumbed to the breath. His burns were fatal. Please." Her voice was sharp, as if fear held her on the verge

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of hysteria. "The spray will cure the burn on your arm. Please sleep now." Then she was gone.

John, half asleep, and scarcely knowing what he did, undressed and stretched out on the stone couch. He slept instantly, but his sleep was peopled by strange dreams of warfare of medieval castles, of clanking shields, and gaudy tunics. But gradually in his sleep the struggle was replaced by a dream of peace and happiness, and plenty.

And while John Kalen slept his men continued to pile new earth on the breastworks of their fortress! They examined the machine guns; and set up three small trench mortars and loaded them with shrapnel ready for instant discharge. And as a last resort, Orkus mounted two flame-throwers, one at each end of the little entrenchment. It was evident that they expected battle, and did not intend to surrender! The preparations where completed and ready when a third bleached skull fell inside the quarter circle of defense!

CHAPTER VI

John Enters Kalendar

JOHN KALEN awoke from a peaceful sleep to find himself in a strange lull of absolute quiet. It was startling. In the midst of a jungle, lying naked on a stone bench with not so much as a birdsong to break the silence! And then he remembered. The falls! The rushing torrent of water had stopped its flow.

With a sudden surge of life he was on his feet, dressing. How much of his ten minutes had elapsed? He fumbled with the leather thongs on his leggingstraps and realized suddenly how he had come to depend on Michael. His hair was a riot from the curling qualities of the mist. But he was ready in a minute and turned to look at the source from which the flow of water had come.

There were the steps as Jalu had described them, cut in the bed of the stream and mounting into the great rocky tunnel which rose at a 45° angle from the opening in the rocky wall. A narrow cut led up to the base of the tunnel.

John strode to the narrow cut to find steps waiting there and mounted them without a backward look. He crossed to the center of the tunnel and started upward in a phosphorescent glow that lighted the interior like twilight. Fifty steps upward and he could still see clearly.

Then he heard it. The crackle of gunfire from the fortress he had left—and Jalu was there! He turned back, hesitated. If he went back he might delay them. They would not follow until he had a ten minute lead. And he knew by now that their lives would be forfeit if he were hurt. He might best protect them by continuing upward into the mystery which lay ahead and allowing them to retreat into the passage behind him.

Reluctantly John turned and faced upward again, mounting quickly, conscious of the fact that he was best protecting Jalu by leaving her in the face of poison darts!

And suddenly John realized with a start that his body glowed with the strange emanation which had characterized Jalu as the golden girl. *He* was radioactive! He had known, in a detached, impersonal way, that that was the purpose for which he slept in the spray; but now that it had happened he was surprised and a little bit appalled.

Still he mounted. There were rises of a hundred feet or so, and then long level stretches of tunnel, then another rise with perfectly cut steps from side to side of the great tunnel.

He did not seem to feel fatigue, though his mind was a turmoil of conflicting thoughts as he felt that a half hour had passed and there was no indication of sound in the tunnel behind him. Two miles he estimated the distance through the radio-active passage—and then daylight ahead!

With a sigh of relief he mounted the last series of steps.

A chill of foreboding struck him as he noticed an increasing trickle of water when he was about fifty feet from the top. He started to run up the last long flight as the flow increased, and reached the opening to the outer air in time to jump aside as a vast wall of water filled the tunnel and roared its way down the trail from which he had just managed to emerge.

For a frozen instant he stood on the little stone platform to which he had scrambled to escape, and gazed in awe at the rushing torrent which spelled certain death to the band which followed him through the strange passageway to a stranger land. Then he turned slowly and gazed behind him, eyes blurred by the thought of those brave souls who had stayed behind. Not a living soul was near the mouth of the rushing stream, but canals stretched straight away in both directions close along the perpendicular rocky wall at his back—and that wall ran straight upward as high as his misted eyes could see!

His hand strayed upward to adjust his headdress over unruly locks, and stopped—he had forgotten to don either headdress or tunic, and stood attired only in his leather girdle and glistening sandals.

Then, again, John Kalen knew the meaning of fear.

CHAPTER VII

Outside the Wall

SUNLIGHT blinded John as he turned away from the sight of rushing water. His eyes had been shadowed too long in the eerie half-light of the tunnel. His brain was tortured by imageries of the death of Jalu and his party.

So he stood, like a statue, eyes blinking against the wicked glare of sunlight reflected from glazed rock walls, and the roar of the water effectively shut out all sound.

Perhaps a minute passed. Perhaps ten minutes. John never knew the meaning of time or motion dur-

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ing that period of numb, silent agony. His first awareness was of strong hands gripping his arms and forcing them behind him.

Even then, he was too baffled to protest. He shook his head and blinked his eyes to clear them as he felt cold metal bracelets snapped about his wrists. He had a confused impression of men, bearing spears, who stood about him menacingly.

Then he was forced to walk a few steps and step onto a flat boat which had drawn close to his platform without him so much as suspecting its presence.

He had a confused impression of a short trip along the canal, and then of being forced out onto a dock where the shade of huge trees brought back his vision.

In utter silence a group of twelve men, obviously guards of some sort, surrounded him and forced him to walk along a flagstone pavement toward a towering mass of what appeared to be white marble.

Up long, twisting stairways he climbed, and into a room hung with rich velvet tapestries the beauty of which made him gasp despite his efforts to be calm and figure out this new turn of fate.

He was halted before a raised dais on which sat three gray-haired, bearded men who gazed at him with a penetration which made him squirm. He felt suddenly that same overwhelming force which had influenced his brain time and again since the first night back in a dim cafe on the New York waterfront.

The leader of his group of guards spoke briefly in a strange tongue, then pointed at John. The gray-haired patriarch in the middle seat listened attentively, then turned and spoke to John, who could only shake his head hopelessly. And again that strange power seemed to seep into his brain as if it would steal his very thoughts.

But now the influence wavered like radio waves in a storm. It was strong, then weak, then jerky, as if doubtful of direction.

The drone of the proceedings went on, in sibilant tones of a strange, musical tongue. Gray heads leaned close together in consultation, then turned back to renewed questioning of their prisoner.

Their agitation showed that they were faced with tragedy, yet it seemed impossible to explain. John only shook his head mutely. That strange force seemed to be questing, seeking to tell him something, but its directional antenna was out of order apparently.

He shrugged.

"It's no use, gentlemen," he said finally, "I can't understand you—nor you, me."

There was a flurry of commotion. One of the judges spoke sharply, and an attendant guard rushed to a side door, returning almost instantly, pushing ahead of him a recording phonograph.

The apparatus was placed before John, and through pantomime he understood that he was to speak his words onto the record. He drew a deep breath and plunged.

"I, John Kalen," he paused as a gasp went up from the otherwise silent gathering, "have been subjected to outrageous indignity. I am unable to defend myself as I stand manacled, because I speak only the English tongue which I have used throughout my entire trip in conversing with the Princess Jalu, Orkus, and the ship's company. Whatever my fate, and I take it to be unpleasant, judging from my treatment, I leave this record in case any of my little company escapes the flooded tunnel. Thank you for the opportunity to record the fact that I have been here on trial."

He nodded to the judges, one of whom came down from the dais to speak a few words, quite evidently identifying his testimony. The record was completed, and the apparatus wheeled away.

Events transpired quickly after that. There was a brisk order and the cordon of guards formed around him. A blindfold was whipped about his eyes and he was led away, on stumbling, uncertain feet.

There was no time to regret the fact that he had ever started on this wildcat adventure. His racing brain was too busy with thoughts of the tragic death of Jalu, and of keeping track of the nature of the surface over which he was walking.

First he traversed smooth marble floors, then a flagstone walk, and then was once more forced aboard a boat which he believed to be a flatboat similar to the one on which he had been transported to the hall of justice. The boat began to move and John's thoughts turned to the chances of escape from his present predicament.

It was quite obvious that he could do nothing until the manacles were removed. A submissive attitude, then, would be necessary for the present—unless he were on his way to death. But that was a chance he'd have to take, and it didn't seem reasonable that such intelligent faces as those of his judges could be guilty of giving him a death sentence for standing on a rock, blinking at the sun.

One matter troubled him exceedingly. Several times during the proceedings, an attendant had pointed at his chest and shrugged. The significance of this action came to him as the flatboat moved slowly toward its destination. A heavy score against him appeared to be the absence of the token worn on the skin of every person he had seen in Kalendar, as well as on every member of his ships crew!

The sun was warm, and John's head ached. Fifteen minutes passed, twenty, twenty-five. It might have been more—or less—for he could not see. The boat grated against piles and he could hear the swish of ropes being tossed.

A babble of conversation sprang up about him for the first time. Feet scraped on the boards of the boat and of the adjoining pier if such it was. Strong hands seized his arms firmly, but not roughly, and helped him over the side. They steadied him on his feet, and helped him climb a flight of twenty-eight steps hewn in rough stone.

He was quickly forced to sit down in a basket to which ropes were attached. He could feel straps being

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fastened to keep him from rising. The handcuffs were removed, and a piece of paper thrust into his hand.

Then he felt the basket bumping and sliding in a quick descent. With a sudden inspiration he tore the blind from his eyes. He was being lowered down the slightly sloping side of a high stone wall which extended as far as his eyes could see in an unbroken line! And below him was the water of a canal!

He heard the basket splash against the surface and tore frenziedly at the straps which held him in. They came loose quickly, and he plunged and swam to the farther bank, a distance of not more than thirty feet.

Dripping and disheartened, John Kalen drew himself ashore, still clutching that paper in his right hand —and expecting to feel the impact of a poisoned bullet in his naked back.

But no bullet came as he ran a zig-zag course across open meadows lush with coarse grasses, and dropped breathless to hide in their scant protection.

A minute passed, another, and another, with no sound except occasional snatches of laughter and conversation from the distant wall.

Lying on his back, still fearful of treachery, John looked at the paper in his hand. It was comprised of short paragraphs in what appeared to be a dozen languages. His eyes ran slowly down the page, and he sat up with a jerk, forgetful of danger.

Toward the bottom of the sheet one of the paragraphs was in French! And one in Italian! And Spanish! And Portuguese! And the LAST which he had almost overlooked, was in English! It read: *"You, stranger, have been sentenced to exile without the wall, for life. We, of Kalendar*, permit no intrusion. We brook no delay in the carrying out of a sentence, lest you introduce unknown disease. You may live if you hunt successfully, and make peace with the renegades."*

John got to his feet slowly, and smiled. He bowed, mockingly, toward the city from which he had just been ushered.

"Well, John Kalen," he said aloud, bending his knees as he spoke, "the fun is over. You may live if you hunt successfully! And make peace with the renegades!"

He shuddered as he thought of the maniacal faces outside the burning brush on a recent night. Then he fished inside his leathern girdle and breathed a

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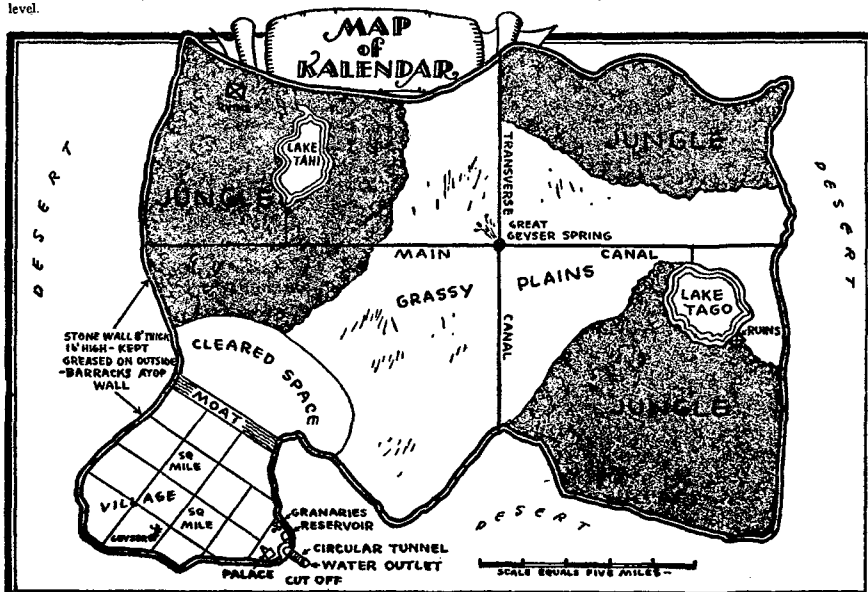
* KALENDAR is a plateau valley in the Andes Mountains, in South America. It cannot be discovered from the air because dangerous air currents make airplane flight impossible at this point. The peaks and ranges which surround it run from 17,000 to 19,000 feet altitude.

Thirty miles to the South, aircraft can cross the Andes at 11,000 feet altitude. Twenty-two miles to the North there's a 13,000 foot level.

Therefore the existence of the country and of the valley has remained a secret to the outside world, except for its penetration by Captain Jacob Kalen (1869-1938) who managed to gain ingress in 1893 but who held his secret inviolate.

The valley level is 5,600 feet altitude. Surrounding walls are smooth for 200 feet upward, then rise in jagged lines for 12,000 feet more. The sun only touches the valley 3 or 4 hours a day. But



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prayer of thanks as he fished out his jack-knife!

Without further ado he moved toward the nearest bushes, and began testing, testing, testing, until he found one with the spring of a steel sinew. Then John Kalen sat down in the long grass and started to build himself bows and arrows until he perfected one bow which seemed strong and sure. He stripped a leather thong from one of his sandals, split it down the middle and strung his bow. The other strip he carefully re-attached to the footgear.

And suddenly the sun was gone.

THERE was no twilight such as we know in the temperate zones. It had been daylight. Now it was dark, with only a tiny strip of light hitting high on the precipitous wall which surrounded the valley. Another minute, and that, too was gone! Overhead John could distinguish stars, but the ground around him was too deep in shadow to permit him further wandering. He sat down again, and shivered as an evening chill settled over the meadows.

A noise of footsteps in the grass made John sit up and reach for his bow. His eyes opened automatically.

"What in—" The words were torn from his lips by surprise. It was NOT dark. The whole valley, the cliffs, emanated a soft, wavering light which enabled him to see clearly. His impression of darkness had been caused by the momentary contrast of shadow when the sun disappeared over the peaks!

There were footsteps again. Slowly he got to one knee, and waited.

Fear began to chase little chills up and down his spine.

What did this outer wilderness contain?

Another step in the dark—the sound of a heavy body brushing against the grass—the crack of a stick—the sound of a snort, which to his mind bespoke some gigantic beast—

And in an instant John Kalen was running, running as he had never run before, away from the wall, away from that questing beast, away from the forest.

He had covered a mile or more in mad flight when he saw a rabbit leap from a clump of bushes. His bow, with arrow affixed, was still in his hand. Without thinking he braced, drew back the thong, and let fly his first arrow, two yards wide of its mark!

John's eyes could not follow the arrow clearly in

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the peculiarly radio-active soil produces crops, and the reflected light of the sun is intensified and prolonged by the radium qualities of the smooth rock walls which provide a dim, twilight emanation even at midnight.

Kalendar is never *dark*. It gets deep *dusk*. But no black night. Thus the growing season is FAST.

Snowfall in winter is sometimes very deep. Five to seven feet of snow is common. But there is *no wind*, and no drifting.

Fuel for heat, is wood from the forests, cut and hauled during the summer. Seasons are the reverse of what we in the north temperate zone experience. July and August are the worst months of winter. February is the hottest month of the year.

When the winter is severe (July and August) the farmers all live in OKKA except a skeleton force which remains on the farms to feed stock. In OKKA the snow is melted with live steam. The streets are kept open, and the canals free of ice.

The enclosed, organized nation of Kalendar contains about 18 square miles of extremely fertile land. The territory is intersected into square mile plots, by canals 12 feet wide and six feet deep. There are twelve farms on each normal sector. Three of the sectors contain additional farms because of their slightly larger area. One sector is occupied by the city of OKKA with its homes, manufacturies, parks and shops. And one sector is occupied by the King's Palace, granaries, government building, and the homes of the nobles.

The city of OKKA is the trading center. It maintains cobblers, weavers, tailors, boat-builders, carpenters, plumbers, bakers, butchers, grocers, and artisans in hereditary lines. A system exists whereby a boy showing aptitude for painting or sculpture, may be "traded" for the son of an artist who shows no such aptitude. He still lives with his own family. The "trade" merely concerns his occupation, and involves the transfer of the hereditary lines in one generation cycle.

The families of the soldiers also live in OKKA.

The city is sanitary, self-governed, efficient. The "Ogdon" (mayor) is a member of the Kalen's Council of Nobles, appointed by the Kalen every second winter. School is mandatory for all children between ages of six and sixteen years.

The total population of OKKA is 16,000 people, of whom 8,000 are of the "unmarried" generation. Each of the 160 farms has an average population of 5, the farmer, his wife, two children, and a man to help in the fields.

Thus the total population of organized Kalendar is about 17,000 people. It never falls below that figure—and hasn't exceeded 18,000 in more than a century.

The renegade population of the outer valley has been estimated all the way from 3,000 to 10,000 people. Actually each estimate has been a blind guess.

The average farm production of the countryside is about 60,000 bushels of wheat; 30,000 bushels of corn; 30,000 bushels of oats; 30,000 bushels of rye; 30,000 bushels of beans. 2,000 acres are devoted to lush pasturage for cattle and sheep. Another 1,000 acres is devoted to gardens, truck, green corn, etc., which is abundant. Milk is supplied to the entire population through the small herds kept on each farm.

All deliveries are made by flatboat, through the canals.

Sugar is unknown in Kalendar (except that it is supplied to the Kalen's table from the outer world. Supplies being brought in by each rare expedition).

* Twenty Noble Families, the heads of which comprise the Kalen's Council of Nobles, have beautiful mansions facing the canals and walls on both sides of the sector.

One of the twenty is named "Primate" and lives in a sumptuous palace to the left of the Kalen's own palace.

These nobles comprise the Kalen's escort on his hunting trip, etc. . . . except that the Kalen and Primate may never leave the sector at the same time as these two alone hold the secret of exit from the valley.*

The sons of the nobles make up the Kalen's Guard. 20 young men.

There are 3 servants in the home of each noble; 10 in the palace of the Primate; 50 in the Kalen's Palace and Gardens; 30 servants are assigned to caring for the sector, keeping the canals clean, the grounds in order, repairing the Kalen's sporting goods.**

Fifty clerks of various ranks, live and work in the government building—which is open at all times to all free citizens of Kalendar.***

Athletic games are played by most of the populace, and there is an annual tournament, sort of a local "Olympic Games" on the tournament ground in the Kalen's Sector. This is the big annual event of the nation.

*It is notable that a serious breach of the law had occurred when John Kalen arrived in Kalendar. The Primate had entrusted his secret to another and had gone hunting with the tragic results told in this history. It was fortunate for him that he was Jalu's father. He speaks English and is a master of hypnosis.

**The servants, 147 in number, are slaves captured as children from the renegade population of the outer valley. They are kindly treated and are happy because their lot as slaves in Kalendar is far better than that of the unfortunate renegade population.

***The clerks are free subjects of the Kalen.

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its flight, but the rabbit couldn't either. Suddenly, the little animal changed its course. It jumped six feet to the right—and the arrow transfixed its prey.

"Well, bunny," John said caressingly as he came up to the little bundle of fur, "methinks the Kalen's luck has taken a turn for the better. Now if I can conjure up a fire?"

CHAPTER VIII

Below the Shower Spray

ORKUS was inspecting the final preparations for defense when Jalu returned alone to the trenches. He went to her at once.

"The Kalen?"

"He's asleep," the girl said, coloring slightly, "I waited to make sure."

"Excellent, Princess. You must return and wait beside him."

Jalu shook her head violently.

"I—I can't, Orkus," she said. "It—I promised his privacy would not be disturbed."

Orkus bowed soberly.

"You gave your word. Then you must come into the dugout. The last skull that fell had a tiny silken parachute attached!"

"What?" Jalu paled. "Does that mean they have airplanes?"

"I can only guess, princess."

A dull explosion sounded, miles away. Orkus listened for a minute intently, then took Jalu's arm and rushed her into the dugout, a cave thirty feet underground.

"Their first shot fell short—and was a dud," he said crisply, "but it sounds as if they had also obtained a cannon. That may mean rifles, too."

"I pray they'll delay," Jalu answered.

"Your orders are to stay below for six hours, come what may," Orkus continued. "Then run for the tunnel whether we follow or not."

"I understand, commander," Jalu said, and smiled.

A loud explosion sounded not far from the trenches. There came the whistling sound of a flying projectile, and finally a muffled sound of concussion in the distance.

Orkus rushed out to the trenches.

"Not a shot. Not a sound until I give the word," he commanded. "I do not want to speak again until I issue the order to let go. But when I speak, they will be upon us. Every rifle shot must kill a renegade. Every second, the flame-throwers must each kill ten—and behind them the machine guns must mow down the distant ranks. Only thus can we throw fear into maniacs. That is all."

And not a sound came from the soldiers waiting at their posts; only the silent nodding of heads in approval of a plan which was sound, and had a chance to succeed.

Orkus sat down on a hummock of dirt below the trench wall, his eyes glued to the glass of a periscope. Now and then his eyes wandered for a brief instant to his wrist watch, ticking away the minutes outside a leather wristband lined with lead.

An hour passed. Four more explosions sounded before the little fortress, each nearer than the last. But now a fifth sounded and it was no closer. Orkus smiled, and his smile passed from face to face along the line. The renegades had failed to find the range, or couldn't reach it from their gun position.

Five hours passed. Five and a half. Five and three-quarters. A smile settled over Orkus' face and he relaxed for just an instant.

Then it came. A horde of leering faces pouring up from the gullies, out from the woods—coming from everywhere, a hundred yards away.

Men gripped their rifles. The bolts clicked bullets into firing chambers. Their faces turned foward their leader whose eyes were riveted to the periscope.

The renegades were a hundred feet away—but still no word! Fifty feet! Orkus raised his hand.

Thirty feet! The hand came down. He shouted at the top of his lungs—and the inferno broke loose!

Long tongues of flame licked into the ranks with the first deadly volley of rifle fire. Machine guns, fanning through the flame, mowed swathes in the horde which followed.

The air was thick with flying darts. A man stiffened and fell flat within the trench. A sporadic burst of rifle fire from the distant trees added to the din.

Jalu, eyes glued to her watch, crept from the dugout and slid like a shadow toward the shower spray. Her face was as pale as death, yet she moved steadily through an atmosphere powdered with poison darts until she reached the stone bench under the spray.

The back of one hand flew to her mouth to still a cry of panic. A terrible fear gripped her—and she dared not tell lest the panic spread.

Something unspeakable had happened!

The Kalen! Here were his headdress, and his tunic. He—couldn't have gone without them—he MUST have been captured by the renegades!

Long minutes, while the fearful battle raged, she stood doubting what to do. Then hearing a lull in the battle—and knowing that if the Kalen were captured he'd be dead, she hid his garments underneath her breast-band, and waited silently.

THE lull came when the renegades retreated, and leaving the flame throwers turned on at full blast the little company retreated to the tunnel and prepared to mount the steps.

"Listen!" Orkus' voice brought every man to a stop. "Something is wrong. The flood is released and rushing down again. Back to the trenches every man of you and fight for your life. This time we battle the renegades to the death!"

Jalu gasped as her ear caught the sound of rushing water. She started after the soldiers but Orkus waved her back.

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"Stay there, Princess. Watch! Watch the water! Watch for the Kalen! Be ready to let us know if it stops again. We have one chance in a thousand that it will."

By morning, when the sounds of battle died, the renegade horde of the outer plain was destroyed beyond all hope of rebuilding in force within one generation. A thousand corpses were sprawled across the area before the trench.

Within the trench, eleven men, including Orkus, watched the woods with red-rimmed, burning eyes looking for surviving attackers.

At last, without orders from his commander, one of the asbestos-suited operators of the flame-throwers climbed out of his stifling costume. The other saw—and did the same.

Orkus nodded his permission. Eight soldiers still gripped their rifles in hands singed by the heat of the flames. The machine-guns were unattended.

STILL the rushing cascade of water poured forth from the tunnel in a roaring message that all was not well in Kalendar. Each hour diminished the chances that it would stop to let them in. Ten days and the reservoirs could no longer admit of its being stopped!

It was nearly noon before Jalu's hail reached the smoke-grimed fighting men.

"Orkus. It's lessening. Come." She called loudly, slowly; and called again.

And eleven men backed cautiously through the

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woods; but this time the weapons were brought back and concealed in a niche beneath the shower spray.

The flow lessened to a trickle, and Jalu led the way with a heavy heart, up the steps, up the inclines, up more steps—knowing that every one brought her closer to a sentence of death for not returning safely with her Kalen. The first woman ever permitted to leave Kalendar—and she had failed!

Step by step the little band moved upward. Orkus, seeing Jalu falter, took her arm and steadied her.

"We did our best," he said softly in her ear. Twenty-nine have died. Perhaps it does not matter if we join them, Princess. The Kalen is not here to brighten life."

Tears burst from Jalu's tired eyes.

"Don't," she begged softly. "Don't say it. Not yet. Let them tell us that he did not come."

"As you will, Princess."

But it was a different Jalu who stood before the tribunal in the hall of justice thirty minutes later. A sharp-tongued tigress whose eyes shone like pinpoints of fury.

"Let me hear the record," she said crisply, "at once."

"Your manner," said the gray-haired patriarch in the center, "ill befits you, princess, when you speak to the council."

"GET THAT RECORD QUICK!" Jalu commanded, and the patriarch nodded to an attendant to bring it.

"Your punishment, if you forget respect again, will be severe and quick, princess. Discipline in Kalendar requires respect to rank. Have you forgotten?"

Orkus, head high, face burned from the hot breath of flame-throwers, turned toward the dais.

"If what we suspect be true, Kando, the Princess Jalu is the highest ranking person in Kalendar, for she was named by the Kalen. None of you has been. And I will fight for her station."

There was a deathly hush in the room, then, like an echo the voices of eight men spoke separately but firmly.

"And I."

"And I."

"And I."

"And I."

And as each man spoke he rose, and stood behind Orkus, his rifle at the ready. And no one of the palace guards made a move, for was not this the company chosen from all the land by the late Kalen, to go and bring back his son and heir?

Then like a voice from the dead, a voice spoke from a record, saying: *"I, John Kalen—"*

There was silence until it stopped—and for a moment after. Tears burst a second time from Jalu's eyes.

Her right hand darted forward to emphasize each accusation as she said to the three judges: *"You, and You, and You, in your inexcusable ignorance, have outlawed the Kalen of Kalendar.*

"And in all the land there are only eleven men to whom he will listen. Eleven men," with a sweep of her arm she included the survivors of the journey, "and one woman."

Orkus leaned forward and whispered in her ear. Jalu looked startled, paled, but fairly shouted.

"Where is the Primate?"

"On a hunting trip," Kando answered softly.

"Despite the law," Jalu said aloud, "I may only hope the Kalen will be merciful." She paused in thought. "Orkus and I must lead the searching party," she mused. "It must be strong for we don't know where the search may lead. Our eight loyal men may go for they will recognize him though they don't speak his language. But first we need sleep.

"Tomorrow at this same hour we start with two hundred men armed with rifles. Tonight we shall rest in the Primate's Palace."

Kando made one last protest.

"You can't take these men there in your father's absence, Princess Jalu."

"You heard what Orkus said about my rank, Kando. I do not choose to take advantage of an accident. But until the Kalen is restored to us my wishes are law, and Orkus is second in all Kalendar in rank if he chooses to make use of his authority."

"And if we do not recognize that fact, princess?" Kando asked. And eight rifles clicked shells into their chambers as one.

"I think you have your answer, Kando," Jalu smiled. "We do not want a civil war in Kalendar. I am certain there would be more than this honored company in my support."

Kando wavered. He leaned his head toward the other judges in consultation. And while he did, heads moved together among the guards. There was a slight commotion of movement and the captain of the guards stepped forward toward Jalu.

Kando looked up expectantly.

But the captain bowed before Jalu.

"I offer you the sword, and the strength of the Kalen's guards, Princess Jalu." He offered his sword hilt first, and Jalu touched it in acknowledgment, and smiled and bowed. The captain stepped backward three steps before turning back to his men.

"Well, Kando?" Jalu asked, "Do you accept the facts?"

Kando bowed stiffly. "Pending the return of the Primate we have no choice," he said, ungraciously. "This is an unheard of situation."

"It is," Jalu agreed. "You have outlawed your Kalen. If I were in your shoes I'd be worrying about that."

CHAPTER IX

Among the Ruins

JOHN KALEN was hungry, with a savage hunger such as drives tigers to the kill. Three days had passed while he moved slowly but surely away from

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the wall of Kalendar, deeper into the valley. There had been little sleep for him. Always, when he rested there came that sound of heavy feet through the grass, through the brush, through the forest—stalking, stalking. Never had this beast come in sight, yet never had it been out of hearing.

He had failed to produce fires on which to cook his rabbit, and this morning he had been forced to discard the carcass as unfit to eat. He had not yet come to the point where he could eat raw meat.

Up to now there had been no sign of human life in the wilderness, yet he hid at the slightest sound. But this morning he came face to face with a crumbling pile of ruins miles deep in a jungle of great trees and vines.

John stalked the pile of stone with the cunning of a panther. It stood deep in the woods—yet was large enough in extent to permit sunlight to penetrate through the trees. And, stalking deep in the shadow of the trees, John could make out a shadowy entrance at the top of a flight of grass-grown steps.

By noon, he had overcome fear sufficiently to mount the steps slowly, bow in hand. Like a white shadow, he slipped into the recess, through the door, into a white-walled chamber forty feet square. Its ceiling was supported by marble pillars and arches. It was sound and tight, the marble floor littered with dust; yet obviously not too long unvisited.

He crept from pillar to pillar, exploring, until he reached the farthest wall. Through another doorway he crept, to a second chamber like an anteroom twenty feet square. This too, was weather tight and held no other door. But John was startled into sudden fear again at the sight of light against the wall under a square opening in the ceiling.

The sun crept in through a series of little windows set high in the wall. It laid a streak of warmth along one wall, and in this sunlight John Kalen lay down—and slept.

Dreams troubled the sleeper. In his tired, hunger-weakened state, sleep pictured his fears. Footsteps, following him, following, coming closer. Ravening eyes glaring at him. In a sudden chill of fear he sat up, cringing back against the wall as the beast leapt at him in his dream. His eyes opened, and before him stood a man, naked except for a loin-cloth, skin tanned like a savage, but obviously white, and clear, laughing, blue eyes. A young man, and beside him a beast as big as a bison but looking like a water buffalo. A rope attached to a ring in the beast's nose, hung over the man's arm, and a blanket was strapped on the great round back like a saddle.

This much John saw before he moved. But at his first motion the stranger drew John's own bow to the full with an arrow pointed at his stomach.

"Agrata?" the man asked in a guttural word or phrase. John was scared, but he was tired, and hungry—and ready to quit.

'Not so you can notice it," he answered weakly.

There was an answering grin and the savage pointed with the arrow at a piece of paper under John's harness. John fished it out (he'd kept the warrant of his exile), and pointed to the paragraph in English. The stranger's eyes laughed. He in turn pointed with the arrow at the paragraph at the top of the list.

John sprang. One hand reached the arrow and tore it free, the other managed a half-Nelson and held for about ten seconds. The savage flicked the rope from his arm, laid the bow down deliberately, and tossed John Kalen over his head like a bean-bag.

"Kargota pani," he said, bracing himself. "Gluk inor wandito."

But John lay still where he had fallen, blood oozing from a cut in his scalp. And after a moment the stranger stripped a leather strap from his blanket-saddle and bound John's hands securely behind his back. Then, lifting the inert figure atop his beast he secured the feet beneath its belly, and led it slowly out of the room, down the steps and deep into the jungle.

Twice, he heard the sound of voices in the distance, and the sound of tramping feet. Both times, man and beast came to a deathlike pose with their unconscious captive. Then when the sounds died away, the slow journey went on, plodding, plodding through trails only jungle-trained eyes could distinguish.

John was conscious of motion, a jarring, jogging motion, and darkness. He began to hear sounds, cracking twigs, heavy breathing. He smelled strange odors, like sweating bodies. His eyes opened and stared upward, at a latticework of leaves, and branches, with now and then a tiny patch of sun. Then his head turned, and he saw his late adversary—but the sight was like a nightmare for only the upper half of the man's body was visible, and it moved up and down like a jack-in-the-box.

In a cold sweat, John sat up astride the beast, and comprehension flooded over him to mingle with fear.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded hoarsely, straining at his bonds.

"Etka loos," the savage told him softly, placing a finger to his lips. "Daka."

And with that John Kalen had to be content.

At dusk they approached a great Geyser that spouted fully fifty feet in the air, and the savage grinned as John exclaimed in wonder.

"Glorious," he said, forgetting for the instant, his situation.

"Glooreeous," the stranger agreed, and nodded in agreement.

John looked startled as an idea sprang into being. Perhaps? He shrugged his shoulders and looked down at himself when he caught his captor's eye.

"John K—" he said. A lightning-like warning told him not to say "Kalen."

The captor looked puzzled. He repeated the gesture and the word: "John."

ONCE more a light dawned on the stranger's countenance. He pointed to himself and said "Dewar."

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Then he pointed to his prisoner and said: "Jon." Then to the beast and said: "Kai." Then the two men grinned at each other.

Close by the Geyser flowed a broad, deep canal. It must have been fifty feet across. John could only guess at its depth, but it looked to be ten feet or more. The sides were smooth as the cliff walls around the valley, a reddish marble or granite.

Dewar led the beast along the canal for fifty feet or so, to where a crude raft made of six logs, lashed together with vines, was staked. He untied John's feet and helped him dismount. He led the "Kai" onto the raft, in the center, where the beast balanced a moment, then obediently lay down. He motioned John aboard, but John made motions to show that he wanted his hands free.

Dewar looked puzzled, and troubled. He finally compromised by untying the bond and replacing it with John's hands in front, instead of behind his back. And the strength of the savage accomplished the feat as easily as if he had been handling a baby.

Five minutes later the craft moved forward along the canal spreading little ripples across the glassy surface. John was seated forward, crosslegged. The Kai lay like a statue in the middle, and Dewar poled the craft along with a skill which proved him a seasoned raftsman.

Eight miles the craft moved before the poleman paused. It made the five miles to the far side of the valley in half the light of the night. Then it turned onto a new canal which flowed along the cliff wall, farther and farther from Kalendar.

The pangs of hunger gnawed and tortured John Kalen as he floated slowly on his journey. His back was toward Dewar, and he worked continuously to loosen the thongs at his wrists.

When John leapt to help tie the raft ashore at the spot Dewar chose to camp, the man grinned. He made no further attempt to tie his captive. The savage proceeded into the woods obviously after game, but John noted that he ignored his bow and arrows, and gripped a weapon similar to an Indian Tomahawk.

Putting an arrow to his bow, John strode beside Dewar, despite the latter's violent pantomime objecting to the use of the weapon.

Two hours later a small deer fell victim to an arrow. Dewar was outraged. He refused to help carry the animal to camp—so John managed alone. The savage had built a fire by some method known only to him. John proceeded to cut a choice piece of meat and roast it.

Dewar watched him hopelessly, watched him taste the roast and smack his lips, watched him eat—and then waited for him to die. But John didn't die! His strength began to return. He beamed on his captor and motioned to the meat. Dewar shook his head again—though less positively.

Finally light dawned.

"Look, you ignorant savage," John yelled, and Dewar grinned.

"See my arrows?" John continued, pointing at the undipped tips. "Now look at yours." He pointed again at the poisoned tips, made motions and went through the agonies of death.

"Now watch." He thrust the point of his own arrow into his arm until it drew blood and laughed at his companion.

Dewar's face was a cloud, then it cleared and he laughed, and leaped into the air with a shriek that sounded for all the world like "Eureka."

John did not have to be told he had made a friend. Dewar's actions in the next half hour proved it. The man cut a steak from the deer, and another. He roasted one for himself and the second for John.

Together they sat before the fire, juice dripping from their jaws while they ate.

CHAPTER X

Tago City

EARLY morning saw the two men poling the raft along the canal. All day they moved slowly, majestically, under the overhanging bows of great trees. Some of the foliage was familiar. Occasional oaks which must have been growing for two hundred years; festoons of Spanish moss which hung strangely from the boughs of giant evergreens.

But John's hunger had not been completely appeased by two meals and his eyes kept straying to the smooth surface of the stream. A vague wonder grew as to the fact that not once during the weeks at sea had he seen a man try to fish!

Could it be that the flow of water from the valley eliminated all aquatic life? Or that fish could not live in the irradiated waters? That seemed doubtful; humans lived their lives in the valley, and foliage flourished.

Once the craft was safely underway it seemed to move with a slow current. Dewar guided it easily, so John laid his pole along the logs and began unraveling a thread from his clothes. It wasn't easy, but in an hour's time he had woven a stout cord nearly eight feet long, and had cut an overhanging branch and whittled it down to the proportions of a willow pole.

Dewar watched, fascinated. John searched unsuccessfully for a pin, then whittled a slender sliver of the wood into a crude replica of a barbed hook. Slicing a tiny piece of meat from the slabs they had saved from the deer, he attached it and tossed the line into the stream.

Almost at once there came a tug and John maneuvered the line in close to the raft and jerked it aboard with a ten inch fish which looked exactly like a northern black-bass.

Once more he tried, and this time the fish was even bigger. It put up a battle that strained his improvised line to the utmost, and just as he flipped it from the water it broke away. Dewar laughed delightedly, but John whittled out another hook and

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tried again. The result was another fish, twelve inches long.

He proceeded to clean and scale them ready for cooking, and as the sun was high, motioned to Dewar that he'd like to go ashore and eat. His captor made no protest but watched for a clearing and poled the raft to the bank. The savage kindled a fire and watched while John impaled the fish on sticks and thrust them into the flame.

It was a delightful change of menu even without salt. John enjoyed every mouthful, then looked up to find that Dewar hadn't as yet touched his, but sat with his eyes glued to his companion's face.

John laughed and made as if to grab his captor's fish, but the savage came suddenly to life and nibbled gingerly at the broiled fish. A change of expression came over his face and he ate voraciously. When it was gone he rose, crossed to John's side and patted his companion's shoulder three times, very solemnly.

THE second night before dark, the raft approached a wide expanse of water and moved confidently out onto what appeared to be a lake perhaps three miles across. John's eyes were searching anxiously for signs of their destination when he saw white stone ruins on the shore; buildings which would have done credit to the Mayans. The raft approached an inlet between two of the piles of stone just as the sudden night settled over the weird valley.

He helped Dewar secure the raft to some pilings, and waited until the Kai debarked onto the stone pier. Then he followed and Dewar motioned him through a shadowy doorway. The passageway was dark, and the hair rose on his head as he heard the flutter of numerous wings, as if the place were alive with bats. Strange sounds issued from crevices, like human moans far in the distance. But John stumbled along through the dark behind his captor.

They had gone perhaps a hundred feet, and turned two corners when Dewar stopped, opened a door and pushed John gently. John took the hint and walked ahead confidently. Not until he heard the door slam shut behind him, and the bar slide into place did he again feel the fear of betrayal. Not a sound came from beyond the door. Perhaps the walls were too thick.

"Dewar!" he called, and listened, but heard only the fluttering of wings.

"DEWAR" he yelled, louder than before, but the fluttering of wings only increased, and the echoes of his own voice answered him.

"Why, you sneaky Kai herder," he exploded, "I've a good notion to rip you apart and throw you in the canal!" Then he laughed at himself, but stopped suddenly, his heart in his throat. He would have sworn that he heard a movement in the darkness! Movement, and a spoken word.

He pressed his body flat against the cold stone wall and held his breath. Nothing! He was losing his mind perhaps, but he stood still, and after a long time he heard a movement again, like the rattle of a chain, and a voice, rasping and hoarse, said:

"English. I could have sworn I heard English!"

"*Eureka!*" John jumped a foot in the air. "Whoever you are and wherever you are, speak to me. You *did* hear English—and you're the first person I've found in this whole benighted valley that I could talk to!"

"Bats," the voice said. "It must be the bats."

"Bats my eye!" John felt his way across the floor toward the voice. "Where are you? For Pete's sake, answer me. Speak to me directly. Prove I'm not bats myself."

And suddenly that tremendous impelling force he had experienced before, probed John's brain until his head ached. He could feel it tearing his thoughts apart and tracing them. Then it was gone, as if it had been switched away to some other part of the world, and there was a long period of silence.

Finally however, that strange figure against the far wall stirred again. He could hear the clearing of a throat, and then a soft voice, fearful, yet proud, spoke directly to John.

"First I will set your fear at rest as well as I can. Jalu is not, I feel sure, dead. Second, I crave your mercy, my Kalen, for breaking the unwritten law by leaving Kalendar in your absence. To think that you would find me here is degradation indeed. To find me in chains, is worse humiliation. Beyond that I perceive that you are free, though confined in this room. Were you counted a prisoner, you too would be shackled to this wall.

"I have learned much these last two weeks. While there is some insanity in Tago, the majority of these people are capable of social organization.

"We might never feel free to eliminate our military, but we might well establish trade with these unfortunates. Our nets prevent our obtaining aquatic foods except on our sporting expeditions. Yet the canals abound with such foods in the outer valley, thanks to your father's wise foresight. We could trade for this food to our national advantage.

"I am saying all these things before you approach, knowing that my life is rightfully forfeit, and feeling it my duty to first present this information."

"Well," John said softly, and again, "Well! I have to be held in chains in Kalendar, banished into the jungle with an admonition to hunt if I want to live, be captured by a savage, make friends with him, get locked up in a marble ruin with some bats in order to find someone who recognizes me as the Kalen of Kalendar—and who speaks English.

"Who are you?"

"I *was*," the voice answered proudly, "The *Primate* of Kalendar. My daughter, Jalu, headed the expedition to bring you to the throne. Who I am, I do not know. That is in your hands, my Kalen."

JOHN heard the rattle of the shackle chains, and he knew as well as if it had been broad daylight,

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that an old man had stood in proud humility and bent his knee as he answered and spoke the title of his sovereign. The situation had its humorous angles.

"Well," John said again, "Let's see. I should have you killed for breaking the law, but if I do I can't very well ask you for Jalu's hand, now, can I? On the other hand I suspect you of being enough of an old schemer to know I was bound to fall in love with an exquisitely beautiful girl if you sent her after me—"

There was a gasp, almost of dismay from the darkness.

"I crave pardon, sire. Jalu was your father's choice, not mine. The orders are over his hand and seal."

"He would!" John was smiling to himself. "On the other hand we're both locked up in the renegade headquarters and if they ever guess who I am I don't think much else is going to matter."

"Come close, my Kalen," the voice answered. "I have schemed a scheme for escape, and perhaps—"

"Perhaps," John broke in. "On the other hand, I've a good notion to teach these people to shoot and go back and conquer Kalendar. After the way I've been treated I think that might be a good idea. And then again we may both be bumped off in the morning. Are there any blankets in here? I need some sleep—and I imagine you do too."

Fortunately for his peace of mind, John did not see the shadowy figure, with one ear glued to the outer side of the wall against the tiny peep hole, nor did he hear the stealthy footsteps as the figure moved silently down the passageway.

He found a bunk against the wall, with some crude covers on it, and crawled in between them. After twenty minutes of restless tossing he discovered the reason and rose again. Without a word he slapped his clothing all over, deserted the bunk and curled up against the wall and went to sleep on the floor. It wasn't cold enough to make him sleep with an army of vermin if he could help it!

CHAPTER XI

John Joins the Renegades

SOMETHING woke John Kalen with a start. He sat up, and his eyes darted quickly around the room to settle on a kindly faced old man with a white patriarchal beard, gazing at him. John smiled and the primate smiled in turn. The man wasn't so old either, John mused. If it weren't for the beard—?

"How old are you?" The question just popped out.

"Fifty-nine, my Kalen," the man answered.

"And what's your name?"

"Gared Dulon." The same humility was in the voice, the same half-fear; half-hope.

John noted the antiquated iron rings around Dulon's ankles, the heavy linked chain which held him within three short feet of the wall.

"I'm afraid, Dulon, that they don't quite trust you," he said nodding toward the chains.

The primate smiled again, and shrugged. "I can hypnotize my guard and make him release me if ever he has the keys with him," he answered calmly, "so I've been patient these ten days."

John's eyebrows raised quizzically.

"That being the case, why couldn't you hypnotize your Kalen into sparing your life?"

The old man looked startled and hurt. He shook his head violently in the negative.

"It is against the law," he said simply, as if that settled the matter for all time.

And John, not doubting the sincerity of his reaction, felt that he could come to like the people of his kingdom a great deal if ever he got to be well-acquainted with them under normal circumstances

The bar on the door rasped, and the door swung in slowly. Dewar's face appeared, then another and another until seven men stood in a little group inside the door.

John bowed ceremoniously. "Welcome," he greeted with a sweeping gesture. But Dewar's face was grave The savage turned toward the older prisoner and spoke a swift chain of unintelligible syllables. Dulon's head nodded almost continuously. When Dewar paused, the primate turned to John.

"I am requested to interpret to you as follows: 'The wall people come forth with an army and break the unwritten law by approaching the Tago country beyond the center canal. You were heard to remark that you might teach these people to shoot and join them against Kalendar. They wish to know if it is true."

"They trust you to ask me correctly?" John's face showed his surprise. The older man drew himself up proudly.

"The nobles of Kalendar do not prevaricate," he said, with the same simplicity he used in his remark anent the law.

"And Kalendar is breaking an unwritten law?" John asked.

"Yes," the primate answered softly. "They have no doubt learned that you are captive."

"So?" John paced back and forth twice. "Tell Dewar that I will join them, teach them to shoot, and defend their land on one condition. They must not use poison on their arrows. They must use them as he and I used ours on the deer."

Gared Dulon paled. He appeared stricken, yet he bowed and turned obediently. There appeared to be an angry controversy among the visitors at his words, but Dewar was gesturing, stamping, pleading, and after five minutes the turmoil quieted. Dewar spoke again to Dulon.

"He asks," Dulon repeated, "if that is a condition which brings victory?"

"Tell him it is in this case."

Dulon nodded, and turned to repeat the message, but John added impulsively, "Tell him also that you

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must be set free to carry a message to Kalendar."

Five minutes later, John went arm-in-arm with Dewar through the damp corridors. They were followed by the primate who was to be freed as soon as all verbal orders had been given.

It became clear that John was suddenly become a field marshal, and that his chief of staff was his savage captor of the last few days.

It was a motley crew that awaited their commanders at the fringe of the forest. Hundreds of men, some of whom showed the signs of incipient insanity, but the major portion of whom showed in their features only the pinch of irregular want, and a certain settled bitterness.

With a feeling of exhilaration mixed with doubt, John gave his orders and the men set to work making bows and arrows. They were plentifully supplied with rawhide thongs and in two hours the force was armed.

ORDERS deploying the force, and setting two hundred men as a mobile reserve in the rear, were passed through the reluctant lips of Gared Dulon. The army deployed forward keeping low in the waist-high grasses of the meadowland.

Four miles straight ahead they moved, from the edge of the Tago forest to within one mile of the canal, before word was passed back that the Kalendrian soldiers were ahead.

"Tell them," John passed his last order, "to shoot to STOP the enemy. NOT to kill the wounded, and to stop shooting as soon as the Kalendrians retreat beyond the canal; that it is time to set you free to start your journey as that, too, is part of the plan for victory."

He listened as the pale, drawn primate issued the orders to Dewar, watched as they knocked his shackles from his wrists and motioned him to go straight to the wall and follow the canal to the walled country, and watched the old man depart with never a backward glance.

Then shouts and fighting ahead drew his attention. For the fight was joined quickly and hard. Men milled back and forth, while he watched from Dewar's Kai, standing erect on the animal's broad back.

John saw that the renegades were more than holding their own on the left wing, and that the right wing was falling back in confusion. He motioned Dewar to take three out of four of the reserve, and charge in support of that right wing.

He saw the force rush forward shouting, saw the wing stiffen and move forward in an overwhelming wave toward the canal. It was exciting, enthralling, despite the fact that blood was being shed. And in the excitement he forgot to watch the left wing!

An excited bowman jerking on his sandal, recalled John's attention to the left. The wing had crumpled and was falling back.

With a wave of his arm and a shout which meant nothing to his men, John charged ahead on the Kai. The fifty bowmen took up the shout, and followed. In five minutes John was in the midst of a milling throng, fighting with bow, and fist and fallen spear.

"Kalen. John, Kalen!" He heard Jalu's voice in the midst of the melee. Then something clipped him on the head and he knew no more.

But the renegades were driving the soldiers of Kalendar back across the central canal. He had kept his word to them.

CHAPTER XII

Fortunes of War

JOHN KALEN was sleeping a troubled sleep. He tossed in dreams of awaking aboard ship at sea. Shadowy forms, of Michael, and a crew of thirty-nine men whom he dared not touch, crept in and out of his subconscious mind like wraiths. And forces penetrated his brain until he twisted and squirmed, and dreamed of beds into which he sank until he smothered.

Voices wavered above him, receded, came close, and were gone again. The odor of medicants assailed his nostrils. Strong lights bothered his eyes even through closed lids. He thought of Jalu—and was suddenly wide awake!

His eyes beheld a room so vast, so luxurious that he rubbed his eyes and looked again. His body rested on a mattress so caressingly soft that—if it were true—it explained his dreams, for he had been sleeping on the ground. Silken covers were over him, and a white-coated figure, obviously a doctor, stood by the foot of the bed, silent, attentive.

John had lost consciousness a leader of the renegades. He awoke, Kalen of Kalendar.

"Do I need you?" he asked softly of the doctor. The man looked down at him, obviously puzzled.

Orkus, stepping forward from nowhere, bowed.

"I have been designated as interpreter, my Kalen, until you have disposed of the cases of Gared and Jalu Dulon." He turned then and spoke to the doctor, then spoke again to John.

"He says you no longer need him, but that you have not bade him leave."

John smiled, waved his hand, and the doctor departed.

"You are rested, sire?" Orkus asked.

"And hungry," John said. But the breakfast was being wheeled to his bedside even as he spoke. He ate almost ravenously of a civilized meal (even though some of the foods were strange) for the first time in more than a week. Orkus, standing stiffly beside the bed, spoke as soon as he had finished.

"Two cases, sire, have been considered by council to be of drastic importance, and are waiting your disposal."

"Two cases, Orkus? And the charges?" John was more curious than concerned.

"Gared, and Jalu Dulon, sire. Gared is charged with violation of the unwritten law in leaving Kalendar

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in your absence. His life, barring your immediate mercy, is forfeit."

John frowned, "And Jalu?"

"Jalu Dulon," Orkus' voice sounded strained, yet he spoke the words in a monotone as of a rote, "is charged with failure to protect the body of the Kalen in the fulfillment of her mission to the outer world, permitting him to suffer indignities and banishment; rebellion against council orders in leading armed men outside the wall toward Tago Lake."

"They are in custody?" John asked quickly.

"Yes, my Kalen, they are in custody, waiting your immediate disposal."

"Bring Jalu in." John's voice was sharp.

Orkus motioned to a side panel, then deliberately turned and stood with his face to the wall. The panel slid back, and Jalu, the golden girl stood proudly, head erect in the closet facing the room. She was nude. Her long, golden hair fell to her waist, providing some slight covering for her body, but only tending to accentuate her loveliness. She stepped forward slowly without a word. Short steps. And John noticed that her hands were manacled, and that her ankles were chained so that she could step only a few inches at a time.

For a moment he stared, fascinated. Then he bounced from his bed and threw the silk covering about her shoulders.

"Orkus, who is responsible for this?"

"Council, sire."

"And who heads the council?"

"Kandu, with Jastro and Wherl as his associates in the action. They have been supreme since Gared Dulon went on his hunting trip." Orkus still faced the wall, stiffly.

"Have these manacles removed at once, Orkus, and send Gared to me, unmanacled—and robed." John slipped into a dressing gown, and stood, waiting, pale with anger. Orkus strode from the room.

Two young girls ran forward from the closet and unfastened Jalu's steel bonds. The girls remained kneeling, one at either side of their late prisoner, heads bowed. John looked at them curiously. Each wore only the high-laced sandals they called Drezza wear, and wide belts, perhaps a foot wide, studded with polished buttons of steel, or some similar metal, from the belts were suspended hooks to which were attached the manacles, and a knife, similar to a huntingknife. Both girls were exceedingly attractive.

A door at the far end of the room opened and Orkus followed Gared Dulon into the room, and came slowly forward.

"Why don't they rise, Jalu?" John asked softly. "They've done what they were told to do."

Waves of color were suffusing Jalu's face. She was trembling. Yet her eyes faced John's own, proud and frank.

"They await their judgment in turn, John Kalen," she whispered. "When you freed me their lives were forfeit for having been a party to the holding of a princess. And so that it is not too late for you to rectify I must tell you quickly that when you threw the cover of your bed about my shoulders you claimed me as the Kalen's property. The Kalen has a right to take what he wishes—but I wish you might not take me that way, sire."

"Would you marry me, Jalu?" John whispered in turn, for Orkus and Gared had stopped some distance back.

"Gladly, John, Kalen, gladly." Jalu's voice held a new happiness, as if a fear had been tossed away. And John took a deep breath and looked out the window. Power over life, and death, and people was his—such power as he had never dreamed belonged to any man. It frightened him.

"Jalu," he said slowly. "The fate of these two girls is in your hands. Give your judgment mercifully. They are too young and beautiful to die."

"Thank you, John, Kalen. They will be attached to my household, then, and you will know they live and are nearby." She spoke a few words and the girls fell forward and kissed her feet. John shook his head hopelessly and motioned Orkus and Gared to come forward.

"Gared," he said without preliminaries. "We are facing far more serious breaches of the law than yours. You suffered ten days imprisonment by the renegades, and fulfilled my mission well yesterday. I am confident of your loyalty. You are therefore restored as Primate of Kalendar. Council is dissolved. Kando, Jastro and Wherl will remain in their homes under guard until I have cleared this entire matter. Orkus will act as supreme commander of the military, answerable direct to me.

"Orkus, were any prisoners taken yesterday?"

"Eleven, sire, including one Dewar, who Dulon says befriended you. We have held them thus far despite council orders."

"There are no council orders in force since Kando sat at head of council," John said brusquely. "Will there be any trouble in enforcing what I have said here?"

Gared Dulon spoke for the first time.

"Thanking you humbly, my Kalen, for your favors. There will be no question of our authority under your orders if we emerge free from the front door of your palace in proper robings, while you in tunic and headdress stand on the upper balcony."

John's brow wrinkled once more at the scope of his sudden power. He almost feared to free a man lest that man's captors die.

"See that none is punished, without my direct order. Bring Dewar and the other prisoners to me. I suppose I have a throne-room or something."

"Yes, sire."

"You two will be busy. I need an interpreter. Jalu will leave with you, but will return, attended properly, to act as my interpreter. Now, hurry, all of you. Dress, while I dress. We must end the confusion in Kalendar quickly."

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"And, one question Orkus. You did not poison your bullets or spears yesterday. Why?"

"The Kalen might be among the enemy, sire." Orkus bowed, and John's three friends moved slowly from the room.

JALU returned within the hour, smiling happily. She waited in an ante-room until John joined her, resplendent in his tunic and golden head-dress. Pacing slowly two steps behind him, at his right, Jalu explained in a low voice as they traversed the soft-carpeted hallways, lined with tapestries. "These tapestries picture the history of Kalendar, my Kalen, from the earliest days of its legendary history until now. An eagle left a baby girl in the valley. Another eagle left a baby boy. From them the nobles of Kalendar descend. Twelve Indians with their squaws lowered themselves down the cliffs while fleeing from an enemy fifteen centuries ago. They were white Indians. From them the people of Kalendar descend. There was dispute in the councils for centuries as to supremacy until the coming of the Kalen, your father nearly fifty years ago. Since his coming there has been no dispute. There will be none under you.

"On the topmost floor is an astronomical observatory with a huge telescope. On occasion this telescope may be turned to observe through special lenses, the activity of all walled Kalendar.

"In other rooms are machines and chemicals, and testing apparatus. In still others machines which throw moving pictures on the wall. It will take a year to familiarize yourself with the Palace." She stopped speaking.

They moved to a hand-carved door at the end of the passage. It swung open silently and John Kalen, stood beside a carved throne. He was startled.

"Sit on the throne, my Kalen," Jalu said softly, kneeling as she spoke. And John's eyes noted that a hundred people filled the domed room, and that in front of the assembly, eleven kneeling figures were renegades.

John sat and the assembly rose. He saw Dewar —a puzzled look on the cleancut savage face, hands manacled.

"Remove Dewar's handcuff's and bring him to me," John said. Jalu repeated the order and in an instant Dewar's hands were free and he stepped forward with a guard on either side.

"Send the guards away from him. No punishments however." Again Jalu spoke and the guards fell back.

"Dewar is my friend?" John asked, and Jalu repeated. Dewar's face brightened into a smile. He spoke. "Always," Jalu said.

"Cannot your people and my people be friends?" he asked again. "Cannot we give you cloth for clothing in exchange for fish from the lakes and the canals? Cannot we help you to bring about order and comforts in your city?"

The faces of the other prisoners were brightening hopefully. They exchanged glances. Dewar was growing in their eyes into a leader. He agreed to question after question as John asked them. The ten renegades still in manacles confirmed his answers.

"Would you protect and treat as friends, men we would send to teach you order? Would you obey my orders if they bring you to better living? And avoid treachery?"

Again there was a willing acquiescence, and John sat in thought for a moment.

"Bring Kandu, Jastro, and Wherl to me," he said brusquely. There was a stir at the back of the room as twenty soldiers took their leave. Through Jalu, John invited Dewar to sit on the step beside the throne and chatted with him for ten minutes. The man's eyes grew bright in appreciation of his closeness to grandeur. John knew that their friendship was one which would endure in loyalty as long as both should live. Suddenly he became aware that his former Judges stood before him.

"I have in mind," John said slowly so that the entire assemblage might hear, "that the situation through which we have been passing is unusual.

"Dewar, seated beside me, is a leader among the renegades. The very fact that he sits beside me here will make him a greater and more respected leader.

"I want to make of Tagoland, a dominion of Kalendar, and I am disposed to give you three men a new opportunity to prove you can govern wisely. You will return with Dewar and his fellows to Tago City for one year. You will be provided with comforts, and a guard of twenty soldiers.

"With Dewar's aid, you will establish social order among the renegades. You will segregate the hopelessly insane into suitable quarters, and help the intelligent balance of the population to establish trade. Their farms need improving. You will attend to that. You will help them build boats to replace their rafts. You will establish a militia to serve as a police force.

"Have the manacles removed from the prisoners. Feed them well, and prepare to return with them to Tago City this afternoon."

The meeting was over. The assembly had departed. John stood in the vast hallway alone with Jalu.

"Do you think it will work?" he asked her softly.

"I know it is the greatest step forward in Kalendar in fifty years," she said softly, her eyes proudly looking into his. "I only fear as to whether the council is to be trusted too far. They have been humiliated—and if they should seek revenge—?"

"Then we have Dewar." John said lightly, "but now, Jalu, is there any reason why I should not kiss you?"

Jalu blushed.

"No reason, my Kalen," she said.

"Then Kalendar can wait—but where can we go on our honeymoon?"

"We might," she said timidly, "explore your palace secrets—together—"

"Right," John decided, "and what matters it if there *is* revolt in Kalendar?"

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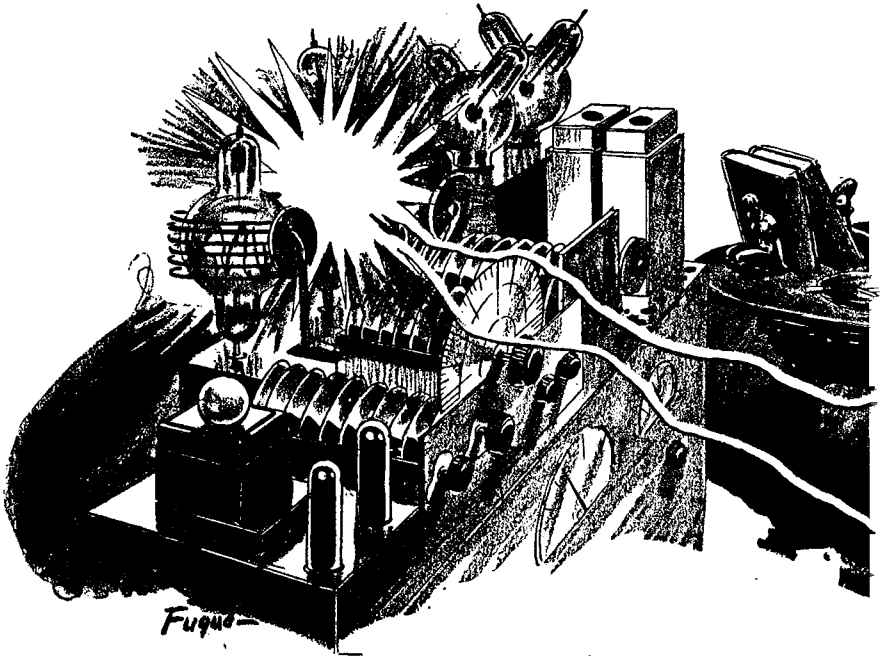
THE MAN WHO SAW



PAT RIKER looked at his watch. Nine A.M. It was almost time for Admiral Gregg's periodic report to the civilization that hung on his every word. He was down in a bleak, white desert, most inaccessible spot on 20th Century Earth. There was always the possibility that disaster might strike. Planes were ready, in Australia and Argentina, to leap off to the rescue, in that event.

Pat Riker tuned the high-frequency wavelength reserved for Gregg's party, and barred to any other transmitter. The minutes ticked by, but no voice came from the far south. Riker turned up his volume, hoping he hadn't missed any of the message. But still no voice! He turned the power-dial up steadily, till a million bees hummed from his set; his own private home-made receiver, the most powerful in the world. Riker was justly proud of it.

He had about decided Gregg had for once been delayed, when he caught the faint sound of a voice, underneath the power-hum. He'd need more volume yet—more than he had ever used before. He glanced a bit anxiously at the tubes, already glowing hotly. He wasn't sure exactly how much they would stand

Suddenly he noticed how tense the tones of the faint voice were. There was trouble! Riker turned up the power with a quick twist. The voice, anxious, became understandable. It was just a whisper in the ether, magnified by the radio's ultra-powers.

"—wrecked. One wing is completely smashed Burrows and Hedgewood are hurt. This is John Caldwell, radio operator. I can only get a half watt out of the batteries, and they will last, at most, 24 hours, repeating this call hourly. Please send the rescue ships immediately. Our position is latitu—"

And then it happened. There was a soft *whoomf* of tubes burning out, and something seemed to stab forth like a bolt of lightning, into Riker's eyes.

He jerked back, shielding his eyes seconds too late. When he removed his hands, he saw nothing but whirling lights that gradually faded. A little shakily, he groped for the power switch, snapping it on and off Dead!

The SOS had been cut off just as Caldwell was about to give their all-important position in the white

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TOO LATE

By EANDO BINDER

THE lives of an entire Antarctic expedition depended on Pat Riker's vision, and he was *worse* than blind. Everything he saw had occurred nearly three minutes before

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hell of Antarctica. Riker chewed his tongue and reflected that coincidence could pop up at the most amazing, and annoying times. But he had been more or less expecting the tubes to give way under the overload of power.

Riker heard now the mewing of Pete, his large Angora cat, from the corner. From the farthest corner of the workship room, in fact. He remembered now that the cat, who had been on the bench nosing at the set, had let out a terrified cry and had leaped away.

"You too, eh?" said Riker soothingly, feeling his way along the wall to the corner and reaching down to pet the animal. He often talked aloud to it, in the long hours of his work. "But it'll be over in a few moments—these spots in front of our eyes. Let's just take it easy till we can see properly again." Riker realized he was trying to calm his own racing pulse.

As he stroked its fur, the cat's frightened mewing changed to a half-hearted purr. They waited, man and cat, as the dancing light streaks obscuring their vision slowly faded. Riker was puzzled. What kind of radiation had struck their eyes, from the overloaded tubes. Ultra-violet?

Of course, it would have to happen at that crucial moment, he reflected bitterly. Five men stranded beside a wrecked plane in isolated Antarctica, position unknown! Riker would have to get his set to working again, and pick up the next SOS, for the position. Without that, the rescue planes might search forever in that white wilderness. And probably no other radio on Earth—it struck him forcefully—could pick up their weak half-watt call! It depended on Riker!

A FEW minutes later, Pat Riker arose. He could see again. He made his way toward the radio, to investigate damages, but let out a startled *"ooff!"* He had struck with his stomach against the back of the easy chair before the radio.

Riker stopped, with his breath half knocked out, and wondered how he could be so clumsy. He hadn't even seen the chair. He looked down at it now. But he still didn't see it!

Furthermore, the most amazing phenomenon took place—the whole room turned down with his eyes. He seemed to be hanging precariously on a vertical floor, with the other end of the room at the bottom of a pit!

Riker made the sound that people make when ice-cold water hits their bare skin. Dizzied, he hastily looked up again. The room obediantly straightened out. This motion, combined with the blow on his stomach, very nearly made him dash for the bathroom, but he had a sinking feeling, mental this time, that he might not find it in time. So, valiantly, he conquered his weakness.

Still swallowing, he eased himself into the chair-cushions, feeling his way. This would take some thought. What was it all about? He wasn't blinded. He distinctly *saw* things. But he was seeing them in the wrong order, or something like that.

Pat Riker felt momentarily dismayed. A hollow feeling came up inside of him. But then he took hold of his nerves. He would reason this out, and not go into a panic. He made experiments in line with mental deductions.

First of all, holding his head rigidly against the back of the chair, he moved his eyes. The scene that he apparently saw did not change in the slightest. He was still seeing the room *from the viewpoint of the corner*, where he had been several minutes before.

But now, suddenly, the scene shifted. He was moving forward in the room—so his eyes told him—toward the workbench. The easy chair now loomed in front of him. He flinched as it struck his stomach—in the view. But that had happened minutes ago He was sitting in the easy chair now. It was like a movie reel passing before his eyes.

Riker put two and two together and got a time-honored four. His vision was somehow *several minutes behind time*. That is, what his eyes saw wasn't transmitted to his brain's optical center until that much later.

He gave out an unhappy grunt as he came to that staggering conclusion. He had never heard of such a thing before and it made his skin crawl.

He reasoned out also why the scenes before his mental eye dipped or rose as he lowered or raised his head. The balancing canals of the inner ear, independent of the eye, knew the slightest change of his head's position. When the canals, linked with gravity, said he was looking down, he was simply looking *down*, even if his delayed vision showed a level floor whose visual impression had struck his retina minutes before—when his head *had* been level.

A puzzled mew, more plaintive than before, came from the corner.

"Poor Pete," said Riker feelingly. "I at least know what's wrong. You don't."

SITTING in the chair, Riker watched the queer delayed sight unwind before his eyes. It all checked The view changed to show the floor and chair, as he had stood looking down, in surprise, after the bump Then the room again, dancing fitfully, as he must have stared around wildly at the time he thought of the bathroom.

He grinned wryly. Once he had taken a boat ride on a choppy lake and had decided then he was no seaman. Now he was sure of it. By sheer force of will he fought back nausea. But why did this have to happen to him, he thought rebelliously—and especially now? Five men down in Antarctica shivered in the icy winds of the South Polar regions. . . .

What had happened to the sane and orderly world he had known just a few minutes before?

Now the view of the room turned as he had fumbled his way into the chair. Then it fused more or less into his present perspective, looking straight out from the chair toward the radio.

Just what had come out of the radio, to cause this?

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The blowing tubes had released some kind of beam, or radiation, that had bathed his eyeballs. But instead of blinding him—he was really lucky at that—it had caused the weird delayed vision. It had played some ghastly trick with his optic nerves. Not being a physiologist, Riker made no conjectures about it, beyond the fact itself. Which, in brief, was that there was a lapse of time between his seeing with his eyes and his "seeing" with his brain. The brain was behind time.

How much? Riker applied a simple technique to find out. He first pulled out his watch, then put it back with a sheepish snort. He couldn't time it that way, obviously, since he couldn't see the watch. So, when he closed his eyes, he began counting:

"One steam-engine—two steam-engine—t h r e e steam-engine—" This method of counting, if one enunciated clearly, seldom fell off the true minute by more than a few seconds.

At sixty steam-engine he started over again. He reached another sixty and had to start once more. This time, at fifty-three, the scene his brain saw flicked out. Thus, since he had closed his eyes two minutes and fifty-three steam-engines before, his brain-perception was approximately three minutes behind his eye-vision.

"Pete," admonished Riker, trying to see some humor in the situation, "if yuh see a mouse, don't bother to jump at it. You will be three minutes too late."

A WHILE later, Pat Riker found himself on edge. The phenomenon wasn't going away. It hadn't occurred to him that it was anything but a temporary condition. It was fascinating in a way, but he thought of the five men, down in the Antipodes, waiting to be rescued. Waiting, in the last analysis, for *him!* To all intents and purposes, he was as good as blind with his trick eyesight. He wouldn't be able to see what his fingers were doing—till three minutes later. How could he repair the radio?

No, the thing would have to go. But obstinately, it didn't, even after an hour. A gray worry made him nervous. He had the fantastic thought that if an intruder were now before him, ready to slit his throat with a sharp knife, he wouldn't know of it! Then he reproved himself for such petty self-concern. What about the five stranded men, in snow-bound Antarctica? That burning thought drove him to make an attempt at repairing the radio.

It wasn't the tubes he was worrying about. They were standard makes, and he had replacements. With a good deal of fumbling, and three-minute peerings at their numbers, he substituted twelve new tubes for the burned out ones. But turning on the switch brought no answering hum from the set. He felt among the wiring and found the source of the trouble three minutes before his eyes saw it. Of the welter of spidery wires leading to his newly invented "subether selector," half were fused short. There were exactly 246 wires. Over a hundred must be replaced and soldered!

Heating the electric iron, he tried soldering some of the leads, performing operations that he saw only after three minutes. He saw that his blind fingers had made mistakes among the closely positioned lugs. And he had knocked three more wires loose, in his blundering. A blind man could do no worse. He gave up, with a nightmarish feeling of helplessness.

Worst of all, he couldn't call in outside help. The most skilled radio technician would be baffled. Riker had only sketchy diagrams of his new circuit. The rest he carried in his head. He might explain—no, that would take days and days, for all those wires.

And the thin thread of voice from Antarctica would cease within 24 hours! What could be done? Riker's brain began to ache. He wondered if in all history, a man had ever been placed in his dilemma. He sat *down to think, biting his lips.*

He jumped up suddenly. Half way to the phone, he decided he was going the wrong way—toward the radio—and turned. But he was still facing that way, as far as he could *see.* Confused, a derelict in the middle of the room, he cursed, stretched out his hands and made mincing steps forward, ignoring what his eyes told him. In this sleepwalker fashion, he finally touched a wall-shelf of books, knocking several to the floor, while his lying eyes told him he should be perched on top the radio, fifteen feet away.

Oriented by the bookshelf, feeling his way, he came to the wall phone and called information. He got the number of the low-wave radio station which, in conjunction with one in Australia, was keeping a 24-hour-a-day vigil for Admiral Gregg's calls. After some shunting from person to person, Riker was finally connected with the key-man, Paul Gregory.

Riker wondered how to begin. He decided to come right out with it. "Admiral Gregg and his men crashed!" he said bluntly.

"What!" Gregory's voice was a shocked treble. "It's true that they missed sending their last regular call, but that doesn't necessarily mean—" He broke off and demanded, "Who are you?"

Riker told his story, except for the delayed vision, which was irrelevant at the moment.

"How could you have picked up that call?" said Gregory impatiently. "Neither we nor Australia did. And no one else has reported such a call. You must be a crank."

He seemed about to hang up. "Wait!" pleaded Riker. "I just happened to pick it up," he stated, as earnestly as he could. He decided against telling of his super-radio—then he *would* be taken as a crank. "You'll simply have to believe me, that those men are stranded."

"You didn't get the position?"

"No. But if you send planes down there, equipped with radio, they might be able to pick up the call," suggested Riker.

The official seemed to reflect. "We'll have to send out at least one, just on the chance you're right," he

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returned finally. "Your set is damaged? Can we send a repair man around? We can't overlook any possibilities—"

"It wouldn't be any use," responded Riker. "My set is completely burned out, because of the power I used." He hung up, feeling a little better over the situation. It was more or less out of his hands now.

TWO hours later Pat Riker decided to go out, delayed vision or no. Besides, he was hungry. He shuddered just a little at the thought of venturing out, with little better optical equipment than a blind man. But he also thrilled a little. In a way, it would be an adventure.

"You stay here, Pete," he admonished, feeling the cat rub against his ankles. "You'd be completely lost, with your lack of reasoning powers." He pushed the animal away and slipped out of the door quickly, cutting off its protesting mews.

He couldn't see the hall that stretched to the front vestibule. He was still seeing the room he had left. He felt his way along one wall, hoping no one else in the big rooming house would come along and see him groping like a blind man.

He stopped when he heard the front door creak open and close again. Someone coming in, just when he didn't want it. He stood still, trying to look aimlessly composed, although why he should be standing in the hall like that would be a question.

Footsteps approached, two pairs of them. "This must be the place," said feminine tones. A man's voice answered in the affirmative.

Riker realized they must be staring at him, standing like a statue. His embarrassment made him decide to move, either forward or backward. He chose forward—and bumped squarely into the woman!

He could hear her stumble back with a sharp gasp. Now she must be glaring at him. "Hm—drunk!" she pronounced, and Riker couldn't blame her for the accusation. He mumbled an apology.

Her voice changed. "Are you by any chance Mr. Riker, the man who called Paul Gregory at the radio station?"

"Yes!" returned Riker wonderingly.

"Oh!" Her voice held relief. "Then it isn't true after all! When I went to the studio, alarmed that no call had come from Admiral Gregg's expedition, Mr. Gregory told me of your message. He said you were probably a crank, but I wanted to make sure." Her voice became reproving. "It was a mean thing to do, Mr. Riker, scaring us about those men being stranded. But I'm glad anyway, that it's just a—a drunken prank."

Riker half growled. His temper rose, with his nerves not in the best condition.

"I'm not drunk!" he denied angrily. "My eyes are a little—weak. Furthermore, it wasn't a prank. It's true, about the message. I did receive it, and Admiral Gregg's party *is* stranded!" He wondered what the woman—he pictured her with a hatchet-face—would say to that.

He heard her sharp gasp, and sensed that she had her hand at her throat. "John! He's in danger!" It was the involuntary cry of a woman, hearing bad news of a loved one.

At that moment, Riker saw the previous scene unfolded, to his slowed sight. He saw the woman come in while he stood still, glance at him and approach, followed by a man with a black case. As she neared, Riker saw she was a young girl, and—far from being a hatchet-faced type—was pretty! Then the hall scene jerked forward, as he had moved before. Her shoulder struck his. She fell back. Then her lips gave out her denunciation. He heard nothing, of course, of words that had been uttered three minutes before.

RIKER came to the present as he heard a muffled sob. He felt suddenly sorry for her. "Your husband?" he asked.

"My brother," returned the girl. Her voice became more controlled. "I'm Rita Caldwell. Mr. Riker, if you picked up one call, you must be able to do it again. I've brought a repair man along from the radio station."

Riker shrugged but turned to lead the way to his room. He knew his course was unsteady, and felt the back of his ears turn red. At the doorway, by dint of careful mental plotting, he made a fairly straight course to the workbench and radio. The radio technician followed and bent over the exposed parts of the set.

Ten minutes later, after useless explanations by Riker, the man gave up without opening his kit of tools. "Queer outfit," he declared, shaking his head. "It's beyond me. It would take me a week to get somewhere with it. There's only one man who can fix it, and that's yourself."

Riker agreed.

"Then why don't you?" demanded the girl. "Instead of—drinking!" She had evidently been brooding about her brother; her face was drawn. "Five men are in danger of death down there! How can you waste even a minute—oh!" She turned away, half sobbing again.

"I tell you it's my eyes," protested Riker lamely. Should he go on and tell of the incredible delayed vision? He started to, but the girl interrupted.

"I'll have to go," she said. "My nerves are unsettled." Her voice came from the doorway, pleadingly. "But please try to repair your radio. So much depends on it!" Then they left.

Pat Riker thought that over and felt miserable. If he only *could* repair the radio! But that was impossible with his damnable delayed vision. He would have to wait till it left him. If it didn't soon, he would seek medical advice. For the second time he left. He felt he had to get away from the room, and the thought of the five men waiting—waiting—

He groped his way down the hall to the vestibule,

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this time without interruption, and stepped from the front door. Then someone came out, while he was standing and said cheerily, "Good morning, Riker!"

"Uh, same to you—" returned Riker. He had been about to add a name, but thought better of it. It sounded like Saunders, third floor roomer, but might be Tillson, second floor rear. They both had deep voices. Three minutes later Riker saw a figure give him a silent greeting, stare at him for a moment and then shrug and walk away. Tillson, after all.

WHEN his vision had caught up, Riker looked over the familiar neighborhood in which he had lived for the past two years. Back of him was the large rooming house. The street was fairly quiet, though the next intersection was busy. He knew his way around, but would have to watch his step with his perplexing slow vision.

He judged his course nicely from the steps and reached the board fence along the sidewalk. He turned, hugging the fence.

Very slowly and deliberately he walked along, trusting that people would step out of his way. He could hear quick sidesteps and feel stares at the back of his neck. He heard one lady's voice, saying to another, "What a rude man! He wouldn't step out of the way an inch!" The other said, "Looks like a sleepwalker, the way he holds his head stiff and doesn't move his eyes."

Riker didn't dare move his head. If he did, the whole street scene before his mental vision would swing with it, and he'd be lost. He must be near now, to the restaurant on the corner. Suddenly disaster struck. A childish voice said, "Look out, mister!" and Riker's shins were bumped by a boy on a tricycle.

Riker's head moved, the whole scene shifted, and he was stranded. How could he know which way to turn and be sure he was right? All directions were right, as far as he could *see*. Blind? It was worse than being blind, he reflected in dismay.

He had to wait three minutes, with his head fixed in one position, till he found out which way he was turned. He put his hands in his pockets and whistled, so people would think he was waiting for someone, standing pointlessly in the middle of the sidewalk. Once again oriented, he aimed for the door of the restaurant. It was almost like aiming a cannon, and then becoming a human cannonball. But an appetite that had always been healthy could not be denied.

He reached the haven of the restaurant safely. He bumped a man going in, said "Pardon me," and then felt himself jostled by others coming out. To Riker for a moment it seemed the universe was filled with elbows, knees and toe-crushing shoes. Belligerent voices told him to watch where he was going, or get glasses if he needed them. Half in a panic, Riker decided he should never have ventured into a small space filled with moving humanity. Shoved and sworn at by low voices, he finally felt a wall at his back and clung to it, flustered and a little miserable.

RIKER stood, waiting to see the tables. In the meantime, his mental eye was seeing the glares of the people in the previous episode. Also his vision had flicked over a clock and he saw the time. It was noon now. He tried to stifle the following thought—that in twenty-one hours or so the thin appeal from Antarctica would blink out into defeated silence. Stubbornly, he told himself not to let it spoil his appetite.

When he saw the tables, he moved for the nearest empty one. As he was about to sit down, some dim warning worked and he stopped. He heard a person's breathing and realized that during the three-minute wait, the empty seat had been taken. With a muttered apology, he moved to the next table and sat down. Luckily, all was well this time. Three minutes later he saw that he had nearly sat down in a young lady's lap, and wondered what pandemonium that would have created.

The process of eating brought up new complications. His mouth was not so easy to find. His first spoonful of soup—he was immediately sorry he had ordered it—touched his nose and spilled down his chin. The second spoonful spilled to the tablecloth, since he hadn't been able to see that he had tilted the spoon. He gave up the soup. The steak was tender but cutting it was nevertheless laborious. He had to gauge carefully and by instinct so the pieces wouldn't be too large. Then, by placing his elbow on the table as an immovable fulcrum, he was able to get the forkfuls of food more or less accurately to his mouth. By these trial-and-error methods, he progressed slowly. He saw other diners watching him surreptitiously, and felt conspicuous, but was too hungry to care much.

An hour later he made his way out of the restaurant's side door, which was less used, without mishap. Outside, he stood for a while, waiting till the cashier was counting out money in his hands, to his lagging vision. Never in his life had Riker failed to check his change from purchases. He wasn't going to start now. The amount was correct. Without thinking, he began stuffing the imaginary bills in his pocket, then grinned ruefully. The money had been in his pocket for three minutes.

He made his way slowly down the street. Go back to his room, avoid all this madness? No! It was at least a unique enough adventure to keep his mind off the stranded Antarctic explorers. And from the thought of the girl and her last appeal. Besides, the queer delayed vision would undoubtedly go away soon.

A little chill went up his spine. Suppose the phenomenon *didn't* go away, ever? Suppose all his life . . . he broke off the disquieting thought.

He saw a clock on a building front. A voice said, within his brain: "Twenty hours!" He began to hate clocks.

He was able to move down the sidewalk of this street with less fear of wandering. It was a traffc

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thoroughfare and the sound of moving cars at his right guided him. He was beginning to learn the value of sound in his sight-delayed world—like a blind man.

But when he came to the next intersection, where the cross street was also a busy boulevard, he wondered how he could cross without risking life and limb. Standing and listening for a while, he found it possible to judge when the traffic lights changed by the squeaks of brakes in one direction and the roars of starting cars in the other. Confident in this reasoning, he started across at the next change. He heard voices of people beside him, also crossing, so he had guessed correctly.

But when half way across, he heard the sudden squeal of brakes, and gasps behind him. Riker stood in a paralysis of fear. Was he in danger? It was ironic to reflect, as he did fleetingly, that he would see the danger in three minutes, but that was no help now. He was stiff as a post, holding his breath, waiting for it to happen.

A HAND clutched his arm and jerked him back three steps. He felt a fender brush his pants leg. There were excited voices.

"Are you drunk?" asked a man's voice in his ear, obviously the one who had rescued him. "I ought to run you in! What's the idea of trying to cross diagonally?"

Diagonally! So he had wandered, and nearly run into a car making a right turn. It was the traffic cop at the intersection who had spoken.

"I'm—I'm a little near-sighted and forgot my glasses," mumbled Riker.

Still holding his arm, the policeman guided him to the sidewalk, lecturing him. Then he left. Riker clung to the corner lamp-post, shaken. Three minutes later he sidestepped a phantom car, his heart almost stopping. It *had* been close. He stood for a while longer, composing his nerves.

As he was about to move away, he heard again that hated squeal of brakes—then a sodden thump and a child's scream. Somewhere before him, an accident had really happened! Almost immediately there was the roar of a departing car—a hit-and-run driver, escaping!

Riker's mind thought of something. As nearly as he could judge, he turned his eyes in the direction of the car speeding away. He watched, with unseeing eyes, but with eyes that *would* see.

In the midst of the confusion of sound over the accident, the traffic cop's voice arose: "Did anyone catch his license number?" Several eye-witnesses gave contradictory numbers. "Always the same!" snarled the cop. "People never keep their heads when seconds count. He'll get away with it!"

Riker tensed himself. Suddenly the accident reenacted itself to his delayed vision. He saw the big car's fender knock a child down, saw it leap away. But he also saw the license numbers, because he had thought to fasten his unseeing eyes on the fleeing car. The numbers were off-focus a little, but prepared a he was to concentrate on them, he swiftly read then off.

It was quite a struggle for the near-blind Riker t get through the crowd to the traffc cop, who had jus placed the unconscious victim in another car, bu finally he clutched the officer's arm.

"I saw the accident," he said eagerly. "And the license number. It was 318-445."

"Good! I'll put that down," returned the police man. His voice changed. "Say, aren't you the near sighted fellow who nearly got clipped a while back—'

But Riker had slipped back into the crowd. He fel a small glow of pride at what he had done, as he con tinued down the avenue. At least he wasn't as badly off as a blind man, in his present condition. He had put his affliction to some small use, and it made him feel good.

But only for a second. Then the nagging though of the five men marooned down in icy desolation cropped to the fore again. Good God, must it plague him every inch of the way? It wasn't his fault that they faced doom. He hadn't *failed* them, in any sense. But he realized he was trying to run away from that grinding implication. Trying to cram his mind with other impressions, so he *wouldn't* feel it was his fault. Detachedly, he reflected that the mind could be an instrument of diabolical torture.

A clock again, in a store window. *"Nineteen hours!"* came the parenthetical thought.

RIKER continued walking in his strange double-world. It was like being in two different dimensions, one a silent unreal image superimposed over the other of sound and touch. Coming to a movie theatre, he decided on impulse to go in. His nerves felt in need of quieting.

The theatre was not crowded so that Riker had little trouble seating himself. It was not till then that he realized what a ridiculous thing the talking picture would be to him. What he saw and what he heard failed to mesh—by three minutes. The handsome leading man, trying to win the lovely lady, was saying: "Drive faster! We've got to get there in time!" Three minutes later a tense face over a driving wheel was cooing: "You're beautiful!"

Entire sequences, where there was little pantomime and the plot movement depended on dialogue, were lost to Riker. With his mind's eye, he was viewing a silent movie too subtle for comprehension. With his ears, he was hearing a radio-sketch with blank holes in its continuity. He contented himself with matching up snatches of previous conversation with visible events in the picture. At a comedy sequence, wherein a dour-faced comedian was trying to throw a lariat, Riker snickered a little. But he stopped in embarrassment, to realize the rest of the audience was silent, almost tearful. Three minutes later he saw the reason—a death scene.

Leaving the theatre when he had had his fill of

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this garbled entertainment, Riker headed for home. A hated clock loomed out of the meanderings of his delayed vision—*eighteen hours!*

It had darkened considerably while he had been in the theatre. A storm was brewing. Jagged flashes of lightning lanced in the sky; the rumble of thunder sounded. One particularly loud roll of thunder came unawares, to Riker. Its flash came something less than three minutes later, in a complete reversal of natural laws. Riker reflected that he was the only one in the world who could say he had heard thunder *before* seeing the lightning flash that caused it!

On the last half-block to his rooms, Riker tried to hurry his slow, careful pace a little. Rain was beginning to patter down. Suddenly, he collided violently with a figure, but recovered his balance. The other person had apparently fallen down, by the sound. There was only a little warning—an angrily muttered "Wise guy!"—and then something cracked on Riker's chin. He reeled against the fence. The other's footsteps receded.

Riker straightened a little dazedly and maneuvered for the haven of his home. When he reached the front door, he witnessed the collision. The other man had been hurrying too, hat pulled low against the rain, and he was a big chap. As a climax, a ballooning fist hurtled into Riker's face. Though prepared, he could not keep from wincing and ducking. He remembered the man's face. If he ever met him again, when circumstances were normal, the debt would be repaid!

Safely in his room at last, his Angora cat welcomed him with a human-sounding meow, rubbing against his ankles. Feeling as though he had returned from an insane asylum, Riker sank thankfully into his easy chair.

"Believe me, Pete," he sighed, as he stroked his chin and the cat's soft fur alternately, "this delayed vision is hell on wheels."

AND then, from directly before him, beside the radio set, came the sound of breathing. Riker started violently, not realizing anyone had been in the room.

"Drinking!" came the accusing voice of Rita Caldwell. "You didn't even see me! And you haven't done a bit of work on your radio."

"How—" choked Riker.

"I got in easily enough," explained the girl shortly, divining his question. "You didn't lock the door. I came back a few minutes ago, to see if you were doing any repairs. Instead, you've been out all this time, while Admiral Gregg and his men—"

"You don't understand—" protested Riker.

The girl's voice became sharply scornful, with a hysterical edge to it. "I understand that you're selfish, inhuman, without a shred of feeling—" She broke off, panting in her emotion.

Riker saw her now, her hands clenched before her, eyes angry. He thought privately that she looked very attractive, even in her excited state.

"If you'll let me explain, I'll tell you why I haven't done any repairs," Riker spoke firmly. He went on, telling of his delayed vision. When he had finished, he saw the first look of amazement on her face, of three minutes before.

"I'm sorry!" she said in a low, sympathetic voice. "I didn't understand."

Riker felt her hand on his suddenly, urging him to his feet. "I'm taking you to an eye specialist," she said.

In a taxi on the way, the girl told how alarm had grown for the safety of the Gregg expedition. No slightest message had been received, though two British cruisers and a dozen aircraft in southern waters were within a thousand miles, with their radio set constantly open. The powerful Australian short-wave station had broadcast an appeal to the expedition to reply immediately, without result. This meant that either the stranded party's return signals were too weak for reception, or that ether conditions were temporarily bad, or that the men had succumbed.

"My brother," murmured the girl. "I may never see him again!"

"Don't think of that," put in Riker hurriedly. "They'll be found. My radio, when it's repaired, will pick up their message, no matter how weak."

He found himself patting her hand, comforting her. She didn't draw her hand away, and Riker saw the smile on her face, a trifle wan, three minutes later.

Several hours later, three specialists gave the results of their examinations. Pat Riker and Rita Caldwell waited expectantly.

"It is a peculiar case," said one of the doctors, clearing his throat. "The rods and cones of your retinas are all right, and are still able to receive light impulses. But the optic nerve, leading to the occipital lobe of the brain, is damaged.

"We surmise that strong ultra-violet radiation was given off by the tubes when they blew out. Your sight was saved by a slim margin. If the rays had been a little stronger, you would have been completely blinded, just as one would be blinded by looking into the sun, and its ultra-violet radiation,* too long."

Riker felt heartened that they had been able to diagnose it so thoroughly. "What about a cure?" he asked eagerly.

The specialists looked at one another. "We believe it a kindness to tell you at once. There is no cure! Those damaged nerve-cells will remain as they are; and the symptoms of delayed vision. You will go through life that way!"

Riker felt as though the sky had fallen. He was as good as blind for the rest of his life! He knew Rita Caldwell was looking at him pityingly, though he would not see it for three minutes. But he felt sym-

*The rays, in Riker's case, striking the sensitive nerve-cells, seared them and caused them to shrink. That made the *synapses*—the spaces between the cells—wider. So when his eyes received light impulses, the impulses had to jump over these wider gaps, and therefore limp to the occipital lobe, taking almost three minutes instead of the normal 1/30 of a second.—Ed.

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pathy for her, thinking of her brother, as the voice in his brain droned out: "Fifteen hours!"

"Glasses, of course, wouldn't help?" said Riker dully.

"Glasses only concentrate light-images for weak eyes. They can't help your damaged optic-nerve. Nor would any operation. There is nothing we can do."

RITA CALDWELL led Riker to the door of his room. They hadn't spoken much, returning from the hospital.

"I'll try to repair the radio," he promised firmly. "I'll work at it all night. Maybe as I go along, I'll find a way to work faster." She squeezed his arm and left. Three minutes later, when he was inside, he saw the look on her face and told Pete she must love her brother very much.

Riker tried to keep his promise. He spent the evening stubbornly improving the technique of using his hands, with visual check-ups three minutes later. If only the web of wires weren't so infernally intricate!

It was to Riker's credit that he thought more of the stranded explorers than himself. But somewhere in his subconscious the phrase "Go through life that way" had stuck, and began to repeat like a dirge, along with the voice that kept counting off the hours of doom for the expedition.

He called up the restaurant after a while and had them bring over sandwiches and coffee. He didn't feel like venturing out again. The adventurous thrill of that had worn off. He poured milk into a bowl for Pete and watched the puzzled, hungry creature half drown itself first till it had gained experience in judging where the milk level was.

Riker went back to work, nervous, harried. The repairs were hardly begun. Working straight through, at this rate, he could not finish in less than 48 hours. And how much time was there left to pick up the weakening signals?—no more than twelve hours!

Riker gave up at midnight. He could do nothing, he groaned aloud. But the men still had a chance. A vast program of organized search had already been launched. Aircraft must be now cruising over Antarctica itself. They might yet pick up Gregg's weak signals and learn their position. Then it would be simple.

But all the time Riker had an insistent inner conviction that the signals were too weak to be intercepted by any other radio on Earth except his own supersensitive set! And that, by the mischance of fate, lay useless.

He went to bed in mental confusion. He was hardly aware that he had undressed. After he turned off the lights, he had to wait three minutes before darkness surrounded him. He reflected humorlessly that he gained three minutes of light over the normal person. But then in the morning, he would lose three minutes. It was like Daylight Saving Time—you never came out ahead.

And then, in the quiet darkness, he had a chance to think over the depressing day. It was beginning to strike home, more and more deeply each minute, what a change had come into his life this day. Today, the delayed vision had been novelty. Tomorrow and the next day and the next, it would be—horror. Go through life that way! He would have that helpless, dependent feeling that blind people must have. He would be a nuisance, and be pitied. His life was ruined! Well, not as bad as that, but it was closer to tragedy than anything else.

He struggled against the stifling incubus of his thoughts. He wouldn't take it lying down. He'd improve his reading technique. He'd never let people read to him, or use Braille like the true blind. How would he live? Oh yes; he had nearly forgotten—he would patent his radio and sell it. He would probably make a tidy little fortune. But he felt no slightest thrill at the thought.

His thought switched away from the personal. Like a spectre, the bleak picture of five men facing doom haunted him. It wasn't his fault, but he felt as thought it was. All his life, if they weren't rescued by a miracle, he'd have that feeling. The disconcerting thought crawled into bed with him. He hated the soft, warm feel of the bed. Those five men weren't in soft, warm beds. . . .

Rita Caldwell's face hovered among the phantoms, sometimes accusing, sometimes sympathetic. More than anything, this tortured him.

RIKER started from a half-doze not long after, aware that he had been tortured by bad dreams. But something else had awakened him. A gnawing sound. When vision burst into his brain three minutes after he had opened his eyes, he looked in the sound's direction. A bright shaft of moonlight streamed through one window, outlining a square patch of the floor. And there crouched Pete, gnawing at a mouse!

Riker watched in amazement. Pete had caught a mouse, with the handicap of delayed vision! It was unbelievable. Had the mouse run right into him? Or—was Pete's sight back to normal? Riker's pulses throbbed with hope. This might be significant. Was there any clue? Yes, the moonlight!

Holding his hands to the sides of his temples, Riker shielded his eyes from the street glow of the opposing window. Looking now at the busily engaged cat, Riker instantly saw its superimposed image, over that of his sight-delayed vision of the room.

Riker jumped out of bed with a wild cry, startling the cat so that it leaped into the shadows with its prey. "Pete, you little rascal!" yelled Riker. "I think you've done it—"

He kneeled in the patch of moonlight and looked up at the moon with a gaze more rapt than any a lover had ever bestowed upon it. But he did not kneel long, in his silent worship. He grabbed his watch from the pocket of his vest, hanging over a chair, and

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looked at the time, in the moonlight. He saw it immediately—one o'clock. Eight hours to go before the last faint signals came from the lost expedition. Eight hours! Could he make it, repair the radio?

His thoughts fluttered. He needed polaroid-lensed goggles. No shops were open at this time of night. Then he remembered and dove for a supply box under the bench, dragging it out into the square patch of moonlight. He tossed out miscellaneous junk, praying silently, and finally found them—two round circles of polaroid glass. He couldn't remember now what he had ever used them for, but there they were, thank Heaven.

Feverishly now, he grabbed wire and pliers, sat on the floor cross-legged in his pajamas, and worked in moonlight. Fifteen minutes later he arose with the two polaroid lenses clamped before his eyes, in a makeshift framework of wire. The device pinched his skin sharply, but he was past feeling.

He snapped on the electric lights, heart pumping. Vision leaped into his eyes, through the lenses. *Instant vision!* Riker let out a single screech of triumph that startled Pete into running under the bed. Fully half the normal lighting was cut off by the lenses, but it was far more important that the curse of delayed vision was gone.

Five hours later, at six o'clock, the phone rang. Riker ignored it for three minutes of persistent ringing, but finally leaped to it and growled a "hello!"

"This is Rita Caldwell, Pat. I had to call you. I've been awake all night, at the studio, hoping they'd pick up a call. They haven't. I guess there's no hope for them anymore." Her voice was shaky, with a peculiar note in it as she went on. "I had to call on you, Pat, I don't know why. I—" Her tones took on a concealing politeness. "Are you all right? I mean, are you—well, all right?"

Riker permitted himself, for the space of a second, to feel a thrill that shot from his head to his toes. She had called to find out about him, not his radio! Then he barked into the phone: "Rita, listen! Come right over. Don't ask any questions. Just come!"

RITA CALDWELL came in, a while later, hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, staring wonderingly at Riker. He had the look of a man whose soul had been saved. Riker gave brief snatches of explanation, of which the girl didn't understand a word, and then commanded her to cut lengths of spider-wire, hold the soldering iron, hold the solder, hand him the iron, hand him the solder, now a wire. . . . At some time or other he excused himself for his pajamas.

The girl settled down into his machinelike system. She dimly comprehended that she had a right to hope the radio would be repaired in time. Three hours to go!

At nine o'clock, 24 hours since Riker had first caught the SOS, and fallen into the toils of delayed vision, he shoved the girl back. He made her sit, with her face averted, in the opposite corner of the room from the radio.

"The tubes might blow again," he explained. "Though I've put in a fuse that should prevent it. Now—"

He snapped on the switch. As he slowly turned up the power, the hum of the superradio hissed through the room. Bit by bit he snaked up the numbers of the volume dial, giving the tubes a chance to take up the peak load gradually. Their two haggard faces strained to hear a human voice underneath the hum.

The volume dial clocked to the end of its stay. The tubes held. Riker let out his breath and tuned with the vernier for the expedition's assigned frequency. A minute passed.

"Hurry! Hurry!" moaned Rita Caldwell, running forward, leaning over his shoulder.

Riker pushed her back roughly with one hand. "Get back!" he snapped, nerves cracking. "The tubes might blow yet. Get back, I tell you. I don't want *you* getting delayed vision, because—" He broke off, wondering what irrelevant thing he had been about to say, in that tense moment.

The girl clutched his arm suddenly, squeezing with surprising strength. A voice, a tiny thread of voice, came from the radio speaker!

"—batteries nearly dead. This will probably be our last call. Position, latitude 78° 4′30″. Longitude, east, 137° 21′ 15″." A pause, then wildly: "For God's sake, can't anyone hear me—"

SIX hours later, Riker, still in his pajamas, stroked the long fur of Pete, who reposed in his lap. Rita Caldwell sat near him. They had been talking of many things, but now she suddenly laughed. "Those glasses! They look so comical! You haven't explained yet, how they work. Can you see perfectly?"

"I can see as well as you, through these polaroid lenses," Riker nodded. "Almost, anyway. By polarized light. Pete, here, who also has delayed vision, caught a mouse in the moonlight last night. That was the clue—moonlight is polarized light. I don't know why, really, but polarized images are transmitted through our trick eyes without more than a second's delay. Maybe it forms a different kind of nerve-impulse that can jump those wide synapses."

The phone rang, and Paul Gregory, calling from the radio station, said: "Gregg's party has been sighted, Riker. A plane just radioed that they're landing beside the wreck. Two more ships are heading there, to pick up all the men. They'll be back in civilization in a few hours, safe and sound, thanks to you. By the way, how much do you want for the patent on your radio? We're prepared to go as high as—"

Riker whistled and half staggered from the phone, though not from delayed vision. He sat down again and put Pete in his lap while telling the girl.

Then he leaned forward a little. "It won't be so bad, wearing polaroid glasses all my life," he said. "They won't look any different on a man than ordinary spectacles. Don't you think so, Rita?"

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The MONSTER

By NELSON S. BOND

CHAPTER I

Burch Patterson Returns

ONE nice thing about the Press Club is that you can get into almost any kind of wrangle you want. This night we were talking about things unusual. Jamieson of the *Dispatch* mentioned some crackpot he had heard of who thought he could walk through glass. "Snipe" Andrews of the *Morning Call* had a wild yarn about the black soul of Rhoderick Dhu, whom Nova Scotians claim still walks the moors near Antigonish. Then, a guy named Joe brought up the subject of Ambrose Bierce's invisible beast.

You remember the story? About the diarist who was haunted, and pursued, by a gigantic thing which couldn't be seen? And who was finally devoured by it?

Well, we chewed the fat about that one for a while and Jamieson said the whole thing was fantastic; that total invisibility was impossible. The guy named Joe said Bierce was right; that several things *could* cause invisibility. A complete absence of light, for one thing, he said. Or curvature of light waves. Or colotation in a wavelength which was beyond that of the human eye's visual scope.

Snipe Andrews said, "Nuts!" Winky Peters, who was getting a little tight, hiccoughed something to the effect that "There are more things under Heav'n and Earth than are dreamed of in your Philosophy—" and then got in a hell of a fuss with the bartender who said his name *wasn't* Horatio.

I said nothing, because I didn't know. Maybe that is the reason why this stranger, a few minutes later, moved over beside me and opened a conversation.

"You're Harvey, aren't you?" he asked.

"That's me," I agreed. "Len Harvey—chief errand boy and dirst scratcher-upper for the *Star-Telegram*. You've got me, though, pal. Who are you?"

He smiled and said, "Let's go over in that corner, shall we, Harvey? It's quieter over there."

That made it sound like a touch, but I liked something about this guy. Maybe it was his face. I like tough faces; the real McCoy, tanned by Old Sol instead of sunlamp rays. Maybe it was the straightness of his back; maybe the set of his shoulders. Or it could have been just the way he spoke. I don't know.

Anyway, I said, "Sure!" and we moved to the corner table. He ordered, and I ordered, and we just sat there for a moment, staring at each other. Finally he said,

"Harvey, your memory isn't so good. We've met before."

"I meet 'em all," I told him. "Sometimes they are driving Black Marias, and sometimes they're in 'em. Mostly, they're lying in the Morgue, with a pretty white card tied to their big toe. Or, maybe—Hey!" I said, "You're not Ki Patterson, who used to write for the Cincinnati *News?*"

He grinned then.

"No, but you're close. I'm Ki Patterson's brother, Burch."

"Burch Patterson!" I gasped. "But, hell—you're not going to get away with this!" I climbed to my feet and started to shout at the fellows. "Hey, gang—"

"Don't, Len!" Patterson's voice was unexpectedly sharp. There was a note of anxiety in it, too. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back into my seat. "I have very good reasons for not wanting anyone to know I'm back—yet."

I said, "But, hell, Burch, you can't treat a bunch of newspaper men like this. These guys are your friends."

Now that he had told me who he was, I could recognize him. But the last time I had seen him—the only time I had ever met him, in fact—he had been dressed in khaki shirt and corduroy breeches; had worn an aviator's helmet. No wonder I hadn't known him in civies.

I REMEMBERED that night, two years ago, when he and his expedition had taken off from Roosevelt Field for their exploration trip to the Maratan Plateau in upper Peru. The primary purpose of the trip had been scientific research. The Maratan Plateau, as you undoubtedly know, is one of the many South American spots as yet unexplored. It was Burch Patterson's plan to study the region, incidentally paying expenses *a la* Frank Buck, by "bringing back alive" whatever rare beasts city zoos would shell out for.

A creature from the other dimension was this monster from Maratan Plateau. Out of nowhere it snatched men to...what?

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From Nowhere

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For a few weeks, the expedition had maintained its contact with the civilized world. Then, suddenly—that was all! A month . . . two months . . . passed. No word or sign from the explorers. The United States government sent notes to the Peruvian solons. Peru replied in smooth, diplomatic terms that hinted Uncle Sam would a damn sight better keep his nutsack adventurers in his own backyard. A publicity-seeking aviatrix ballyhooed funds for a "relief flight"—but was forbidden the attempt when it was discovered she had already promised three different companies to endorse their gasoline.

The plight of the lost expedition was a nine-days' wonder. Then undeclared wars grabbed page one. And the National Air Registry scratched a thin blue line through the number of pilot Burchard Patterson, and wrote after his name, "Lost."

But now, here before me in the flesh, not lost at all, but very much alive, was Burch Patterson.

I had so many questions to ask him that I began babbling like a greenhorn leg-man on his first job.

"When did you get back?" I fired at him. "Where's your crew? What happened? Did you reach the Plateau? And does anyone know you're—"

He said, "Easy, Len. All in good time. I haven't told anyone I'm back yet for a very good reason. Very good! As for my men—" He stared at me somberly. "They're dead, Len. All of them. Toland . . . Fletcher . . . Gainelle . . ."

I was quiet for a moment. The way he repeated the names was like the tolling of a church-bell. Then I began thinking what a wow of a story this was. I could almost see my name bylining the yarn. I wanted to know the rest so bad I could taste it. I said,

"I'm sorry, Burch. Terribly sorry. But, tell me, what made you come here tonight? And why all the secrecy?"

"I came here tonight," he said, "searching for some one I could trust. I hoped no one would remember my face—for it *is* changed, you know. I have something, Len. Something so great, so stupendous, that I hardly know how to present it to the world. Or even—if I should.

"I liked the way you kept out of that crazy argument a few minutes ago—" He motioned to the bar, where a new wrangle was now in progress. "—because you obviously had an open mind on the subject. I think you are the man whose help and advice I need."

I said, "Well, that's sure nice of you, Patterson. But I think you're overrating me. I kept my yap shut just because I'm kind of dumb about scientific things. Ask me how many words to a column inch, or how many gangsters got knocked off in the last racket war, but—"

"You're the man I'm looking for. I don't want a man with a scientific mind. I need a man with good, sound common-sense." He looked at his wrist watch. "Len—will you come out to my home with me?"

"When?"

"Now."

I said, "Jeepers, Burch—I've got to get up at seven tomorrow. I really shouldn't—"

He leaned over the table; stared at me intently.

"Don't stall, Len. This is important. Will you?"

I told you I was snoopy. I stood up.

"My hat's in the cloak-room," I said. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER II

The Thing in the Shed

PATTERSON'S estate was in North Jersey. A rambling sort of place, some miles off the highway. It was easy to see how he could return to it, open it up, and still not let anyone know he had returned. As we drove, he cleared up a few foggy points for me.

"I didn't return to the States on a regular liner. I had reasons for not doing so—which you will understand in a short time.

"I chartered a freighter, a junky little job, from an obscure Peruvian port. Pledged the captain to secrecy. He landed me and my—my cargo—" He stumbled on the word for a moment. "—at a spot which I'm not at liberty to reveal. Then I came out here and opened up the house.

"That was just two days ago. I wired my brother, Ki, to come immediately. But he—"

"He's working in L. A.," I said.

"Yes. The soonest he could get here would be tonight. He may be at the house when we arrive. I hope so. I'd like to have two witnesses of that which I am going to show you."

He frowned. "Maybe I'm making a mistake, Len. It is the damnedest thing you ever heard of. Maybe I ought to call in some professor, too. But—I don't know. It's so utterly beyond credibility, I'd like you and Ki to advise me, first."

I said, "Well, what the hell is it, Burch?" Then I suddenly remembered a motion picture I'd seen some years ago; a thing based on a story by H. G. Wells. "It's not a—a monster, is it?" I asked. "Some beast left over from prehistoric ages?"

"No; not exactly. At least, I can assure you of *this*—it is not a fossil, either living or dead. It's a thing entirely beyond man's wildest imaginings."

I leaned back and groaned. "I feel like a darned kid," I told him, "on Christmas eve. Step on it, guy!"

THERE were lights in the house when we got there. As Burch Patterson had hoped, Ki had arrived from California. He heard us pull up the gravel lane, and came to the door. There was a reunion scene; one of those back-clapping, how-are-you-old-fellow things. Then we went in.

"I found your note," Ki said, "and knew you'd be right back. I needn't tell you I'm tickled to death you're safe, Burch. But—why all the secrecy?"

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"That's what *I* asked him," I said. "But he's not giving out."

"It's something," Ki accused, "about the old work shop behind the house. I know that. I was snooping around back there, and—"

Burch Patterson's face whitened. He clutched his brother's arm swiftly.

"You didn't go inside?"

"No. I couldn't. The place was locked. Say—" Ki stared at his brother curiously. "Are you feeling okay, guy? Are you sure you're not—"

"You must be careful," said Burch Patterson. "You must be very, very careful when you approach that shed. I am going to take you out there now. But you must stand exactly where I tell you to, and not make any sudden moves."

He strode to a library table; took out three automatics. One he tucked into his own pocket. The others he handed to us. "I'm not sure," he said, "that these would be any good if—if anything happened. But it is the only protection we have. You *might* be lucky enough to hit a vulnerable spot."

"A vulnerable spot!" I said. "Then it *is* a beast?"

"Come," he said. "I shall show you."

He led the way to the work shop. It lay some yards behind and beyond the house; a big, lonesome sort of place, not quite as large as a barn, but plenty big. My first idea was that at some time it must have been used as a barn, for as we approached it, I could catch that animal odor you associate with barns, stables, zoos.

Only more so. It was a nasty, fetid, particularly offensive odor. You know how animals smell worse when they get excited? Or when they've been exercising a lot? Well, the place smelled like that.

I was nervous, and when I get nervous I invariably try to act funny. I said, "If they're horses, you ought to curry them more often."

I saw a faint blur in the black before me. It was Ki's face, turning to peer back. He said, "Not horses, Len. We've never kept horses on this estate."

Then we were at the door of the shed, and Burch was fumbling with a lock. I heard metal click; then the door creaking open. Patterson fumbled for a switch. The sudden blaze of light made me blink.

"In here," said Burch. And, warningly, "Stay close behind me!"

We crowded in. First Burch, then Ki, then me. And as Ki got through the door, I felt his body stiffen; heard him gasp hoarsely. I peered over his shoulder—

Then I, too, gasped!

THE thing I saw was incredible. There were two uprights of steel, each about four inches in diameter, deeply imbedded in a solid steel plate which was secured to a massive concrete block. Each of these uprights was "eyed"—and through the eyes ran a third steel rod which had been hammered down so that the horizontal bar was held firmly in place by the two uprights.

And on this horizontal rod was—a *thing!*

That is all I can call it. It had substance, but it had no form. Or, to be more accurate, it had every form of which you can conceive. For, like a huge, black amoeba, or like a writhing chunk of amorphous matter, it *changed!*

Where the steel rod pierced this blob of *thing* was a clotted, brownish excrescence. This, I think, accounted for some of the animal odor. But not all of it. The whole shop was permeated with the musty scent.

The *thing* changed! As I watched, there seemed to be, at one time, a globular piece of matter twisting on the rod. An instant later, the globe had turned into a triangle—then into something remotely resembling a cube. It was constantly in motion; constantly in flux. But here is the curious part. It did not change shape slowly, as an amoeba, so that you could watch the sphere turn into an oblong; the oblong writhe into a formless blob of flesh. It made these changes instantaneously!

Ki Patterson cried, "Good God, Burch! What unholy thing is this?" and took a step forward, past his brother's shoulder.

Burch shouted, "Back!" and yanked at Ki's arm. He moved just in time. For as Ki quitted the spot to which he had advanced, there appeared *in the air* right over that spot, another mass of the same black stuff that was captured on the bar. A blob of shapeless, stinking matter that gaped like some huge mouth; then closed convulsively just where Ki had stood a moment before!

And now the fragment on the rod was really moving! It changed shape so rapidly; twisted and wriggled with such determination, that there was no doubt whatsoever about the sentiency governing it. And other similar blobs suddenly sprang into sight! A black pyramid struck the far wall of the shed, and trembling woodwork told that here was solid matter. An ebon sphere rose from nowhere to roll across the floor, stopping just short of us. Most weirdly of all, a shaft of black jolted down *through* the floor—and failed to break the flooring!

That's about all I remember of that visit. For Ki suddenly loosed a terrified yelp; turned and scrambled past me to the door. I take no medals for courage. He was four steps ahead of me at the portal, but I beat him to the house by a cool ten yards. Burch was the only calm one. He took time to lock the work-shed door; then followed us.

But don't let anyone tell you *he* was exactly calm, either. His face wasn't white, like Ki's. Nor did his hand shake on the whisky-and-splash glass, like mine. But there was real fear in his eyes. I mean, *real* fear!

The whisky was a big help. It brought my voice back. "Well, Burch," I said. "We've seen it. Now, what in hell did we see?"

"You have seen," said Burch Patterson soberly, "the thing that killed Toland, and Fletcher, and Gainelle."

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CHAPTER III

Patterson's Story

"WE found it," said Burch, "on the Maratan Plateau. For we did get there, you know. Yes. Even though our radio went bad on us, just after we left Quiché, and we lost contact with the world. For a while, we considered going into Lima for repairs, but Fletcher thought he could fix it up once we were on solid ground, so we let it ride.

"We found a good, natural landing field on the Plateau, and began our investigations." He brooded silently for a minute. Then, reluctantly, "The Maratan is even richer in paleontological data than men have dared hope. But Man must never try to go there again. Not until his knowledge is greater than it is today."

Ki said, "Why? That *thing* outside?"

"Yes. It is the Gateway for that—and others like it.

"Some day I will tell you all about the marvels we saw on the Plateau. But now my story concerns only one; the one you have seen.

"Fletcher saw it first. We had left Gainelle tending camp, and were making a field survey, when we saw a bare patch in the jungle which surrounded our landing field. Fletcher trained his glasses on the spot, and before he even had time to adjust them properly he was crying, 'There's something funny over there! Take a look!"

"We all looked then. And we saw—what you saw a few minutes ago. Huge, amorphous blobs of jet black, which seemed to be of the earth, yet not quite of it. Sometimes these ever-changing fragments were suspended in air, with no visible support. At other times they seemed to rest naturally enough on solid ground. But ever and ever again—they changed!

"Afire with curiosity, we went to the open spot. It was a mistake."

"A mistake?" I said.

"Yes. Fletcher lost his life—killed by his own curiosity. I need not tell you how he died. It was, you must believe me, horrible. Out of nowhere, one of the jet blobs appeared before him . . . then around him . . . then—he was gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Ki. "You mean—dead?"

"I mean gone! One second he was there. The next, both he and the *thing* which had snatched him had disappeared into thin air.

"Toland and I fled, panic stricken, back to camp. We told Gainelle what we had seen. Gainelle, a crack shot and a gallant sportsman, was incredulous; perhaps even dubious. At his insistence, we armed and returned to the tiny glade.

"This time, it was as if the *thing* expected us—for it did not await our attack. It attacked us. We had barely entered its domain when suddenly, all about us, were clots of this ever-changing black. I remembered hearing Toland scream; high and thin, like a woman. I dimly recall hearing the booming cough of Gainelle's express rifle, and of firing myself.

"I REMEMBER thinking, subconsciously, that Gainelle was a crack shot. That he never missed anything he aimed at. But it didn't seem to matter If you hit one of those fleshy blobs, it bled a trifle—maybe. More likely than not, it changed shape. Or disappeared entirely.

"It was a rout. We left Toland behind us, dead, on the plain. A black, triangular *thing* had slashed Gainelle from breast to groin. I managed to drag him half way out of the glade before he died in my arms Then I was alone.

"I am not a good pilot, under best conditions. Now I was frantic; crazed with fear. Somehow I managed to reach the 'plane. But in attempting to take off, I cracked up. I must bear a charmed life. I was not injured, myself, but the 'plane was ruined. My expedition, hardly started, was already at an end."

I was beginning to understand, now, why Burch Patterson had not wanted the world to know of his return. A tale as wild, and fantastic as this would lead him to but one spot—the psychopathic ward Had I not seen the *thing* there in the shed, I would never have believed him myself. But as it was—

"And then?" I asked.

"I think there is a form of insanity," said Burch, "which is braver than bravery. I think that insanity came upon me then. All I could comprehend was that some *thing;* a *thing* that changed its shape; had killed my companions.

"I determined to capture that *thing*—or die in the attempt. But first I had to sit down and figure out what it *was!*"

Ki licked his lips. "And—and did you figure it out, Burch?'

"I think so. But the result of my reasoning is as fantastic as the *thing* itself. That is why I want the help and advice of you two. I will tell you what I think. Then you must say what it is best to do."

I poured another drink all around. It wasn't my house, or my liquor, but nobody seemed to mind. Ki and I waited for Burch to begin. Burch had picked up, and was now handling with a curiously abstract air, a clean, white sheet of notepaper. As he began, he waved this before us.

"Can you conceive," he said, "of a world of only two dimensions? A world which scientists might call 'Flatland'? A world constructed like this piece of paper—on which might live creatures who could not even visualize a third dimension of depth?"

"Sure," said Ki. I wasn't so sure, myself, but I said nothing.

"Very well. Look—" Burch busied himself with a pencil for an instant. "I draw on this sheet of paper, a tiny man. He is a Flatlander. He can move forward or backward. Up or down. But he can never move *out* of his world, into the third dimension, because he has no knowledge of a dimension angular to

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that in which he lives. He does not even dream of its existence."

I said, "I see what you mean now. But what has that to do with—"

"Wait, Len." Patterson suddenly struck the paper a blow with one finger; piercing it. He held the sheet up for our inspection. "Look at this. What do you see?"

"A sheet of paper," I said, "with a hole in it."

"Yes. But what does the *Flatlander* see?"

Ki looked excited. "I get it, Burch! He sees an unexpected, solid object appear before him—out of nowhere! If he walks around this object, he discovers it to be crudely round!"

"Exactly. Now if I push the finger farther through the hole—"

"The object expands!"

"And if I bend it?"

"It changes its shape!"

"And if I thrust another finger through Flatland—"

"Another strangely shaped piece of solid matter materializes before the Flatlander!" Ki's eyes were widening by the moment. I didn't understand why.

I said, "I told you I didn't have a scientific mind, Burch. What does all this mean?"

Burch said patiently, "I have merely been establishing a thought-pattern, Len, so you can grasp the next step of my reasoning. Forget the Flatlander now—or, rather, try to think of *us* as being in his place!

"WOULD we not, to a creature whose natural habitat is a higher plane than ours, appear much the same sort of projection as the Flatlander is to us?"

"Suppose a creature of this higher plane projected a portion of himself into *our* dimension—as I projected my finger into Flatland. We would not be able to see *all* of him, just as the Flatlander could not see all of us. We would see only a tri-dimensional cross-section of him; as the Flatlander saw a bi-dimensional cross-section of us!"

This time I got it. I gasped,

"Then you think that *thing* in the work-shed is a cross-section of a creature from the—"

"Yes, Len. From the Fourth Dimension!"

Patterson smiled wanly.

"That is the decision I reached on the Maratan Plateau. There confronted me the problem of capturing the *thing*. The answer eluded me for weeks. Finally, I found it."

"It was—" Ki was leaning forward breathlessly.

"The Flatlander," said Burch, "could not capture my finger, *ever*, by lassooing it. No matter how tight he drew his noose, I could always withdraw my finger.

"But he *could* secure a portion of me, by fastening me to his dimension. Thus—" He showed us how a pin, laid flat in Flatland, could pierce a small piece of skin. "Now if this pin were bolted securely, the finger thus prisoned could not be withdrawn.

"That was the principle on which I worked, but my task had just begun. It took months to effect the capture. I had to study, from afar, the amorphous black *thing* which was my quarry. Try to form some concept of what incredible Fourth Dimensional beast would cast projections of that nature into the Third.

"Finally I decided that one certain piece of black matter, occurring in a certain relationship to the changing whole, was a foot. How, it is not important to tell. It was, after all, theory, coupled with guesswork.

"I constructed the shackle you have seen. Two uprights, with a third that must pierce the *thing*; then lock upon it. I waited, then, many weeks. Finally there came a chance to spring my trap. And—it worked!"

Ki said, "And then?"

"The rest is a long and tiresome story. Somehow I found my way to a native village; there employed natives to drag my captive from the Plateau. We were handicapped by the fact that we could never get too near the trap. You see, it is a *limb* we have imprisoned. The head, or eating apparatus, or what ever it is, is still free. That is what tried to reach you, Ki, there in the shed.

"Anyway, we made an arduous trek to the coast. As I have told you, I chartered a vessel. The sailors hated my cargo, and feared it. The trip was not an easy one. But I was determined, and my determination bore fruit. And—here we are."

I SAID, "Yeah—here we are. Just like the man who grabbed a tiger by the tail; then couldn't let go. Now that you've got this *thing*, what are you going to do with it?"

"That's what I want you to tell me."

Ki's eyes were glowing. He said, "Good Lord, man, is there any question in your mind? Call in the scientists—the whole damned brigade of them! Show them this thing! You've got the marvel of the age on your hands!"

"And you, Len?"

"You want it straight?" I said. "Or would you like to have me pull my punches?"

"Straight. That's why I asked you out here."

"Then get rid of it." I said. "Kill it. Set it on fire. Destroy it. I don't know just how you're going to do it, but I do know that's the thing to do.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, Ki—so shut up! I'm a dope. Sure. I'm ignorant. Sure. I don't have the mind or the heart of a true scientist. Okay—you win! But Burch said I had common sense—and I'm exercising it now. I say—get rid of that damned thing before something happens. Something horrible that you will regret for the rest of your life!"

Ki looked a little peeved. He said, "You're nuts, Len! The thing's tied down, isn't it? Dammit, man—you're the kind of guy who holds back the progress of the world. I bet you'd have voted to kill Galileo if you'd been alive in his day."

"If he'd trapped a monster like this," I retorted, "A monster who'd already killed at least three men,

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I'd have voted just that way. I'm not superstitious, Burch. But I'm afraid. I'm afraid that when Man starts monkeying with the Unknown, he gets beyond his depth. I say—kill it, now!"

Burch looked at me anxiously.

"That's your last word, Len?"

"Absolutely my last," I said. I rose. "And just to prove it, I'm going home now. And I'm not even going to write a damned word about what I've seen tonight. I don't care if this is the best story since the Deluge—I'm not going to write it!"

Ki said, "You give me a pain, Len. In the neck."

"Same to you," I told him, "only lower down. Well, so long, guys." And I went home.

CHAPTER IV

Terror

I KEPT my word. Though I had the mimsies all night, tossing and thinking about that crazy, changing black *thing*, I didn't put a word concerning it on paper. I half expected to hear from Burch Patterson some time during the next day. But I didn't. Then, the following morning, I saw why. The *Call* carried a front page blast, screaming to the astonished world the news that, "the missing explorer, Burch Patterson, has returned home," and that "tonight there will be a convocation of eminent scientists" at his home to view some marvel brought back from the wilds of upper Peru.

All of which meant that brother Ki's arguments had proven more persuasive than mine. And that tonight there was to be a preview of that damned *thing*.

I was pretty sore about it. I thought the least they could have done was give me the news beat on the yarn. But there wasn't any use crying over spilt milk. Anyway, I remembered that Ki's paper had a tie-up with the *Call*. It was natural he should route the story that way.

And then I went down to the office, and Joe Slade, the human buzz saw who calls himself our City Editor, waved me up to his desk.

"You, Harvey," he said, "I'm going to give you a chance to earn some of that forty per we're overpaying you. I want you to represent us tonight out at Patterson's home in Jersey. He's going to unveil something mysterious."

I said, "Who—me? Listen, chief, give it to Bill Reynolds, won't you? I've got some rewrites to do—"

"You, I said. What's the matter? Does New Jersey give you asthma?"

"Chief," I pleaded, "I can't cover this. I don't know anything about science or—"

"What do you mean—science?" He pushed back his eyeshade and glared at me. "Do you know what this is all about?"

That stopped me. I didn't want to go, but if I ever admitted that I'd known about Patterson's changeable what-is-it, and not beaten the *Call* to the streets with the story, I would be scanning the want ads in fifteen seconds flat. So I gulped and said, "Okay, boss. I'll go."

EVERYBODY and his brother was there that night. I recognized a professor of Physics from Columbia U., and the Dean of Paleontology from N. Y. U. Two old graybeards from the Academy of Natural History were over in a corner discussing something that ended in—zoic, and the curator of the Museum was present, smelling as musty as one of his ancient mummies.

The Press was out in force. All the bureaus, and most of the New York papers. Ki was doing the receiving. Burch had not yet put in an appearance. I found a minute to get Ki aside, and told him what a skunky trick I thought he'd pulled on me, but he merely shrugged.

"I'm sorry, Len. But you had your chance. After all, I had to think of my own paper first." Then he smiled. "And beside, you were in favor of destroying the *thing*."

"I still am," I told him dourly.

"Then what are you here for?"

It was my turn to shrug. "It was either come or lose my job," I said. "What do you think?"

Then Burch put in an appearance, and the whole outfit went genteelly crazy. Flash bulbs started blazing, and all my learned *confrères* of the Third Estate started shooting questions at him. About his trip, the loss of his comrades, his experiences. I knew all that stuff, so I just waited for the big blow-off to follow.

It came, at last. The moment when Burch said:

"Before I tell my entire story, I prefer that you see that which I brought back with me," and he led the way out to the work-shed.

Ki and Burch had fixed up the place a little; put chalk lines on the floor to show the visitors where they might stand.

"And I warn you," Burch said, just before he opened the shed door, "Not to move beyond those lines. Afterward you will understand why."

Then the crowd began to file in. From my vantage point in the rear, I could tell when the first pair of eyes sighted that *thing*—and when every subsequent visitor saw it, as well. Gasps, exclamations, and little cries of astonishment rippled through the crowd as one by one they moved into the room.

The *thing* was still suspended on its imprisoning rod. As before, it was wriggling and moving; changing its shape with such rapidity that the human eye could scarcely view one shape before that turned into another. In view of what Burch had told me, I could comprehend the *thing* better now. I could understand how, if that black blob of flesh captured by the bar were *really*—as Burch presumed—a leg of some ultra-dimensional monster, the movements of that limb, as it sought to break free, would throw continually changing projections into our world.

I could understand, too, why from time to time we

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would see *other* bits of solid matter appear in various sections of the room. Though these seemed disassociated with that chunk hanging on the trap, I knew it was really separate portions of the same beast. Because if a *man* were to thrust four fingers, simultaneously, into Flatland, to the Flatlander these would appear to be four separate objects; while in reality they were part of a single unit in a dimension beyond his powers of conception.

The astonishment of the professors was something to behold. I began to feel a little bit ashamed of myself, there in the background. Perhaps I had been wrong to give Burch the advice I had. Perhaps, as Ki had said, this was one of the greatest discoveries of all time. It belonged to the world of science?

One of the photographers was dropping to his knee; levelling his Graflex at the shifting, changing *thing* on the rod. I caught myself thinking, swiftly, "He shouldn't do that!" Evidently Burch had the same idea. He took a swift step forward; cried, "Please! If you don't mind—"

He spoke too late. The man's finger pressed. For an instant the room was flooded with light.

AND then it happened. I heard a sound like a thin, high bleating that seemed to come from far, far away. Or it may not have been a sound at all, in the true sense of that word. It may have been some tonic wave of supernal heights; for it tortured the eardrums to hear it.

The thing on the rod churned into motion. Violent motion. It grew and dwindled; shifted from cube to hemisphere; back to cube again. Then a truncated pyramidal form was throbbing, jerking, churning on the steel. Where I had once noticed an old, ugly, healed wound; ichor-clotted, now I saw ragged edges of black break open. Saw a few, fresh gouts of brownish fluid well from what seemed to be raw edges in that changing black.

Burch's horrified voice raised above the tumult.

"Get out! Get out—all of you! Before it—"

That was all he found time to say. For there came a horrible, sucking sound, like the sound of gangrenous flesh tearing away; and where there had been a changing black shape swirling on an imprisoning steel rod—now there was nothing!

But with equal suddenness, several of the shapeless blobs of matter from various parts of the room seemed to rush together with frightful speed. Someone, screaming with terror, bumped against me then. I fell to my hands and knees in the doorway; feeling the flood of human fear scramble over me.

But not until I had seen a scimitar-shaped blob of black flesh reach out to strike at Ki Patterson. Ki had not even time to cry out. He went down, dead, as though stricken by the sickle of Chronos.

I cried, "Burch!"

Burch had turned to face the coalescing monster. A revolver in his hand was filling the little room with thunder. Orange gouts of flame belched from its muzzle; and I knew he was not missing. Still the thing was closing in on him. I saw what appeared to be four jet circles appear in a ring over the head of Burch Patterson. Saw the circles expand; and a wider expanse of black—flat and sinister—appear directly over his head. They came together with a clutching, enveloping movement. Then—he was gone!

SOMEHOW I managed to struggle out of that work shed. Not that it made any difference. For with the disappearance of Burch Patterson, the *thing* itself disappeared.

I won't try to describe the frightened group of news men and scientists who gathered at the Patterson house. Who trembled and quaked, and offered fanatic reasons for that which had transpired. Who finally summoned up courage enough to return to the shed cautiously; seeking the mortal remains of Burch Patterson.

They never found anything, of course. Ki was there, but Ki was dead. Burch was gone. The air was still putrid with that unearthly animal stench. Beneath the steel "trap" Patterson had built for his *thing*, there was a pool of drying brownish fluid. One of the scientists wanted to take a sample of this for analysis. He returned to the house for a test-tube in which to put it . . .

Maybe it was the wrong thing for me to do. But I thought, then, that it was best. And I still think so. If he had taken that sample; made that analysis; sooner or later another expedition would have set out for the Maratan Plateau in search of that *thing* whose blood did not correspond to that of any known animal. I *didn't believe this should happen.* So, while he was gone, I set fire to the work shed. It was an old place; old and dry as tinder. By the time he had returned, it was a seething cauldron of flame. It made a fitting pyre for the body of Ki Patterson . . .

But—I don't know. I have wondered, since. Somehow, I have a feeling that Burch Patterson may not be dead, after all. That is—if a human can live in a dimension of which he cannot conceive.

The more I think of it; the more I try to reconcile that which I saw with that which Burch told me; the more I believe that the thing which descended upon Burch, there in the shed, was not a "mouth"—but a gigantic paw! You know, I saw four circles appear . . . with a flat black spot above. It could have been four huge fingers . . . with the palm descending to grasp the daring tri-dimensional "Flatlander" who had the audacity to match wits with a creature from a superior world. *If that be so . . .* and if the *thing* were intelligent . . . Patterson might still be alive . . .

I don't know. But sometimes I am tempted to organize another expedition to the Maratan Plateau, myself. Try to learn the truth concerning the *thing* from beyond the Gateway. The truth concerning Burch Patterson's fate.

What would *you* do?

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(Continued from page 4)

of that distant time, was responsible for their remarkable mutations and rampant growths!

If the magnetic shield failed, they would return.

But long before these indirect consequences manifested themselves, we would have swifter evidence of the disastrous effects of cosmic radiation. Rank vegetation would push up through every crack, tearing sidewalks and streets apart. It would reach up avidly and take hold in every crevice of buildings. Cities would become steaming, impassable jungles!

Swiftly, then, will the damage be done to men. Even as they scurry in panic at the first announcement of the catastrophe which Geiger counters, instruments for measuring quantity and intensity of cosmic rays, have just discovered, the insidious malignant changes will be working in their bodies!

Of those changes only this need be said: *No two men will be alike—and none will any longer be a human being.*

Is there no escape? Perhaps—but only perhaps.

Mankind might escape, if awakened to the danger early enough, by burrowing deep into the earth. Cosmic rays can penetrate thirty feet of lead, more than a hundred feet of solid rock! Eventually, however, their force is spent. Beneath millions of tons of rock, in lead-lined chambers of perpetual night, man might find sanctuary.

There he might work out a new destiny. But the struggle,would be bitter. Euthanasia, or mercy killing, would have to be practiced to eliminate the worst of the human monsters. Others would have to be sterilized so that only the most normal would mate and gradually restore the purity of the race.

Yet out of all that tragedy, and in overcoming the tremendous handicaps of the new existence, man might rise to greater heights. *If given the chance.*

For the earth itself may be destroyed!

With protons, cores of hydrogen atoms, physicists have finally succeeded in completely smashing atoms of other elements. Rather, those elements are split into equal portions of elements of lower weight, and the remaining mass is released explosively. All sorts of powerful secondary emanations are included in those violent explosions whose energy greatly exceeds the 800,000 to 1,700,000 volts of the original splitter protons produced in the cyclotron.

And in the bursts of particles created by cosmic rays are protons five to ten times that powerful!

The earth will then be swept by a tornado of countless billions of atomic explosions. In the weird light of their secondary emanations it will writhe and shudder. Great fissures will open—perhaps reaching down into the bowels of the earth and exposing man in his last refuge!

Nor will the destruction stop there. In the splitting of atoms with protons, high-speed neutrons are emitted. And they can destroy other atoms!

The process will continue until the world is utterly annihilated.

There is the prospect—unpleasantly well-founded on known facts. But what is the possibility of it all coming to pass?

Cosmic rays were formerly thought to have originated as a by-product of the primeval explosion of a single mass of matter. From this, according to proponents of the expanding universe theory of Lemaitre, all stellar bodies were formed, being hurled away from that central point in remote space. But recent tests show that cosmic rays come from closer to home!

If they originated outside the Milky Way, the galaxy of stars to which our sun belongs, certain variations in their intensity should be found. When the sun and planets are on the forward side of the great disc-shaped rotating wheel of the Milky Way, more cosmic rays should strike us. Just as one riding on a merry-go-round in the rain feels more drops on his face than on the back of his neck!

This variation in cosmic rays has not been found. Therefore they must originate as free particles somewhere within our own galaxy. Perhaps they are stepped up to cosmic energy by the magnetic fields of double stars, in the same way that man-made cyclotrons speed up particles by repeated electrical 'pushes.'

But only one *definite* fact can be stated about cosmic rays. Whatever their origin or cause, they are always with us!

Can the same be said for our shield against them?

Much more is known about the earth's magnetic field—and it is not reassuring! Studies of the occurrences of magnetic storms, disturbances in the earth's magnetic field which affect radio transmission and operation of telephone and telegraph lines, show that they are related to the appearance of sunspots. Those atomic storms in the sun are responsible for its own magnetic field. And the stronger the solar field, the weaker becomes the earth's!

At a time of unusual sunspot activity, the earth's shield against cosmic rays could fail.

Sunspots, in number and intensity, follow an involved series of cycles. First, there is one in which highs and lows return approximately every eleven years. But variations in their regularity are caused by another, independent cycle of more than a century's duration. And when the highs of both cycles match, there *is* a period of unusual sunspot activity!

Powerful enough to affect the earth's magnetic field? There is at least one more cycle of sunspots, a super-cycle with a period greater than a millenium. When the highs of *all* coincide, when all cycles are pulling together—sunspot activity could be powerful enough to *destroy* our protective shield!

Data has not been kept long enough to tell how frequent are such deadly conjunctions. Possibly never before in the history of the world has the absolute maximum of sunspot activity been reached. But we are now near the high of an eleven year cycle, approaching the high of a hundred year period.

The peak of a greater cycle may *also* be at hand!

We may be at the threshold of the ultimate catastrophe . . . if the earth's magnetic field fails . . .!

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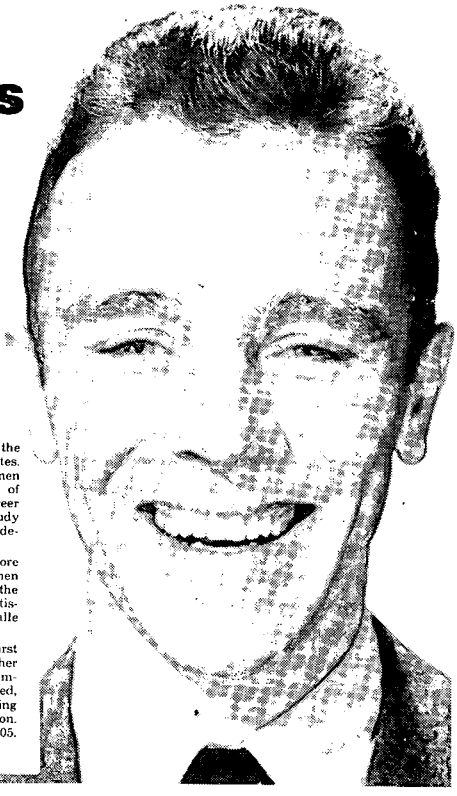

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